

HOMERIC INFLUENCES IN MODERN POETRY:

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO W.B. YEATS AND EZRA POUND

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# I

"[It]is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. . . Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."

- T.S. Eliot. "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

As an introduction to the examination of the modern period and two of its major literary figures in relation to Homer, it is valuable, I believe, to make a survey of the background in English literature of the long-standing tradition of classical and specifically Homeric influences from the Middle Ages to the end of World War I. This may make clearer the degree to which each writer either follows, modifies, or diverges from conventional lines. His unique quality arises from the combination of his personal debt to the poets whom he has succeeded, with his own individuality.

The Middle Ages produced a society which was so orientated towards Christianity that the writings of the ancients which scholars studied and those of their predecessors and contemporaries which they preserved were in general valued for their didactic Christian content. Knowledge of Greco-Roman history and myth survived the Dark

Ages mostly in distorted forms and was further confused in the medieval mind because of a lack of historical perspective: the immediate and remote past were combined, the historical and fabulous were undifferentiated, and the myth of one civilization was juxtaposed with that of another. In an awareness of theories which claim a common anthropological origin of the myths, Yeats and Pound centuries later deliberately associated legendary figures who were, on the surface, unrelated, but the medieval poet wrote of them unthinkingly, as if drawing upon fairy tales of a common provenance.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries formed an era of vigorous intellectual life, with innovations in a vast range of knowledge and speculation: theology, philosophy, politics, law and education. The rise of the modern university brought a new spirit of questioning and examination into society. A significant aspect of this cultural expansion was the appearance of a large number of poems and prose works on classical subjects. At this stage many important Greek and Latin works were rediscovered, translated and studied for the first time since the onset of the Dark Ages.

Of enormous influence throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was a romance written in 1160 by Benoît de Sainte-Maure in North-East France. His Roman de Troie



was based on two apocryphal accounts of the Trojan war: one was poor Latin forgery drawn and abbreviated by "Dares the Phrygian" from a Greek original which claimed to be an eye-witness account of the whole war; the second was the Diary of the Trojan War by "Dictys of Crete", who pretended to be the official historian of the Greeks. Benoît probably used these bogus versions because of the difficulty of Vergil's Latin and the scarcity and incompleteness of the only known Latin translation of the Iliad. Besides, the forgeries appealed because they emphasized romantic love and left out the perplexing battles of the gods, which would have confused the twelfth century Christians. Le Roman de Troie, then, provided an attractive version of a partially forgotten story, influential because it was in the vernacular.

Not only did it re-establish in the European mind the knowledge of classical legend and history lost to those outside the scholarly world, but it also reversed the pro-Greek sympathies of Homer and made the Middle Ages and the Renaissance pro-Trojan. To those seeking noble origins, the sack of Troy had provided a useful dispersal of its citizens, about whose colonization legends had inevitably sprung up. Vergil's pro-Trojan epic gave the Romans a noble and virtuous race to claim as ancestors; similarly in the Middle Ages the tendency to trace one's origins to the Trojans persisted: Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the

Kings of England, written in 1135, insists upon the Trojan descent of British royalty, and in The Faerie Queene Spenser celebrates Elizabeth I's glory as the great descendant of the last British king in the line of Arthur and ultimately of the Trojan exile, Brute. Benoît's romance endorsed the popularity of the Trojans in the common mind, and in England at least the very name was laudatory. Gilbert Highet<sup>1</sup> gives the examples of Ben Jonson's Every Man in his Humour, 4.4: "the honestest old brave Trojan in London" and Thomas Dekker in The Shoemaker's Holiday, 5.5: "all gentlemen of the gentle craft, true Trojans". Even in the present the bias persists, although the allusions are scarcely recognized: it is praiseworthy to fight like a Trojan, and the admonition to beware of Greeks bearing gifts has still sufficient currency to be used in satire of modern personalities.

Benoît's influence on English literature came through two channels. Boccaccio's Filostrato in 1340 expanded the invented romance of the flirtations of Briseida, daughter of the Trojan priest Calchas, who deserted to the Greeks. Boccaccio changed her name to Griseida and emphasized the role of Pandarus as go-between. Chaucer

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1 Highet, Gilbert. The Classical Tradition(Oxford, 1949).

adapted the poem as Troilus and Criseyde. Secondly, Caxton published an English translation of a plagiarism of Benoît in 1474, which together with Chaucer's poem and Chapman's Homer was probably the source for Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida.

The place of Boccaccio in the influence of the classics on English literature is not confined to his provision of source material. His greatest importance lies in his abandonment of Christianity, a reaction which naturally encouraged the use of Greek myths at the expense of conventional Christian themes. This rejection of the prevalent morality and theology was not a negative, but a positive assertion of the superiority of Greek and Roman ideas of god and moral precepts, which were seen as better, freer, and more real, because they were more closely corresponding to the reality of worldly existence. Christianity in contrast was ascetic and misanthropic. There were earlier examples than Boccaccio, in the twelfth century love poets of France, but he, as the first great modern author to align himself with the movement, began a tradition traceable throughout subsequent literature and culminating in the neo-paganism of the nineteenth century and the secularism of the twentieth century. In the Renaissance paganism asserted itself against Christianity. As will be seen, it recurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

disguised and distorted in the Battle of the Books. The Revolutionary era produced fierce adoration of everything Greek in writers like Shelley and in the 1830s Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God. In the twentieth century Yeats, Pound and Lawrence turned away from Christianity to mysticism or ancient civilizations and fertility rites, while Eliot, after giving supreme expression to the sterile emptiness of the Chapel perilous of the modern wasteland, retreated to the consolations of the religion which he had earlier denied.

The Renaissance writers dispensed classical influence in three main ways: through translation, imitation and emulation. A Spanish, a French and a German translation of Homer were made in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, but were much like medieval paraphrases, and were drawn not from the original Greek, but from Latin translations. Petrarch, whose poetry was taken as a model throughout the Tudor period, cherished a Greek copy of Homer which he could not read; Boccaccio's attachment to the Greek masters was so great that he made one of the earliest Latin translations, though a very bad one, of the Iliad and the Odyssey, with the help of a Calabrian Greek. The fifteenth century saw the beginning of the extensive discoveries, the systematic creation of libraries by means of organized copying, and the rapid multiplication of translations from the Greek.

The first serious attempts at rendering Homer into modern verse came in France and England. Hugues Salel, whom Pound praised as charming, delightful, and alone of all the French and English versions to give any hint of Homer's unique characteristics, produced his translation of the Iliad 1-10 in 1545 and Du Mans in 1547 translated the first two books of the Odyssey. In England Arthur Hall, unable to read Greek, translated Salel in 1587, and, more influentially, Chapman published his versions of the Iliad in 1611, the Odyssey in 1614 and the Homeric Hymns in 1616.

The English Renaissance period was dominated by the dramatic form and it followed that the major influence should come from the classical playwrights. Here the Greeks played a lesser part; it was the Romans Seneca and Plautus who provided the models for imitation and emulation. The Trojan theme in its distorted form remained a living force, however: the first English tragedy was Sackville and Norton's Gorboduc, played at the Temple in 1562 and concerned with the mythology of Trojan Britain. In about 1584 George Peele produced a work in the Trojan tradition, modified by the current literary idealization of the monarch. It was The Arraignment of Paris, which gave the initial promise of dealing with "the tragedy of Troy" but soon developed into an elaborate compliment to Elizabeth amid

a pastoral festival at which the golden apple was presented not to Aphrodite but to the Queen herself.

Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida originated in the pro-Trojan tradition and undoubtedly contributed to its survival. The prologue itself established an atmosphere alien to that of the Iliad - the Greeks' righteous siege had degenerated into an opposition of pride to romantic love:

"From isles of Greece  
The princes orgillous, their high blood chaf'd,  
Have to the port of Athens sent their ships  
Fraught with the ministers and instruments  
Of cruel war . . . and their vow is made  
To ransack Troy, within whose strong immures  
The ravish'd Helen, Menelaus' queen,  
With wanton Paris sleeps - and that's the quarrel."

It is felt that the play was written for an Inns of Court audience, a sophisticated group for whom the central characters were well-known, so that it is clear that the forgeries which had been so successful in establishing the Trojans as popular favourites had also led to the creation of people and situations so familiar that they had become proverbial.

In all probability Shakespeare had been able to read Chapman's translations of a part of the Iliad, books 1 and 2 and 7-11, which were published as a preliminary to the complete epics in 1611 and 1614. There are identifiable borrowings from the Iliad to support this belief, but even with this version of the Troy tale available to him,

Shakespeare did not understand Greece as he did Rome and the whole play tends to be a caricature rather than an evocation of the Greek way of life. Other references to the fall of Troy occur in The Rape of Lucrece and Hamlet, but in both cases the source is obviously not Homer but Vergil.

The Renaissance revealed to Western Europeans a vast reservoir of forgotten material in the form of classical history and mythology. This treasure was exploited enthusiastically, sometimes producing works of art, but at the opposite extreme turning out elaborate trash and uninspired classical allusions which were either hackneyed or pedantic and obscure.

A subsection of the Renaissance epic was the Christian religious epic, which dealt with subjects from Hebrew or Christian history and myth, but was constructed in a classical form. Milton's Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained belong in this class. His protagonists came only superficially from the Bible; their characteristics owed more to pagan epic. The Olympian deities appeared under the guise of angels and devils; the battle of the gods in the Iliad supplied the model for the battle in the Heavens, in which the overthrow of Satan was derived from that of Ares; and Milton's God acted not like Jehovah but like Zeus, whose use of the scales to decide the fate of the heroes was

transferred to the Christian deity. Even though the Old Testament could provide examples of beings monstrous in size and strength, Milton turned more naturally to the figures of mythology. To him, Satan must be placed beside those

"Whom the fables name of monstrous size,  
Titanian or Earthborn, that warred on Jove,  
Briareos or Typhon, whom the den  
By ancient Tarsus held."

- Paradise Lost: I, 196f.

Quoted by Hight, op.cit, p.147.

Milton's wide classical study made him adept in the art of "evocative quotation", a practice which fell into disrepute with the decline of classical knowledge, but has been revived in the modern age, in Eliot's ironic echo of Cleopatra's majesty in "The Waste Land":

"The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,  
Glowed on the marble"

and in Pound's whole principle of assuming the personae of past writers and composing poetry which in part echoes the words and in part captures the atmosphere of his model, even to the extent of bypassing the original meaning.

Milton and the moderns together provide a contrast with the Romantic theory that all good writing had to be entirely "original", much though Pound would recoil at the association of Milton's name with his own.

Milton did not hesitate to advance from using short classical references to basing whole scenes on those of



his predecessors. He used Homer in his longer poems, particularly in Comus, where much of the significance of the powers and the menace of the sorcerer depended upon a knowledge of the Odyssey and the attributes of Circe. Milton's debt to the Homeric epics rather than to the forgeries is evident not only in his borrowings but in his attitudes: the character who suffered most at the hands of the anti-Greek tradition was Odysseus, whom Milton in a passing allusion admiringly called "wise Ulysses", instead of condemning him as a cunning and treacherous rogue.

With the same edifying intent as Milton, but on a lower plane, and similarly indebted to Homer, Francois Fénelon published his Télémaque in 1699-1717. It was written to the fashionable romance formula, using a vaguely classical background and apparently classical names and customs. Deriving its original stimulus from the Odyssey, it took Telemachus all over the Mediterranean in search of his father. Its chief aim was to educate a young nobleman and it therefore contained much criticism of Louis XIV and contemporary kings. The book had a vast progeny of edifying historical romances as well as a considerable following in its own right; Richardson endorsed it by references in both Pamela and Clarissa.

Télémaque, an unconscious ancestor of Ulysses in its

adaptation of the Odyssey to suit its own time and purpose, was succeeded by a more conscious effort to recreate the epic in a new form. Fielding wrote Joseph Andrews in 1742 and Tom Jones in 1749. In the preface to the former he cited "the Telemachus of the archbishop of Cambray" as an example of the "epic kind" in conjunction with the Odyssey and was obviously aware of the trend away from poetry and towards prose which was to lead to the popularity of the novel. References to Homer recurred constantly, together with emphatic expressions of Fielding's intention to write a comic prose epic. Homeric similes and epic descriptions were parodied, in keeping with the comic spirit of the novels, but throughout Fielding made clear his reverence for his original model.

Scenes of battle lent themselves especially well to mock-heroic treatment and he rejoiced in the opportunities: Joseph Andrews' victory over a pack of hounds involved even an Homeric intervention of the gods. Fairmaid, a bitch "descended from an Amazonian breed", "had shared the fate of those we have mentioned before, had not Diana (the reader may believe it or not as he pleases) in that instant interposed, and, in the shape of the huntsman, snatched her favourite up in her arms!"<sup>2</sup> Molly Seagrim's epic encounter

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews, intro. Mary Ellen Chase, (New York, 1958), p.216.

with the Somersetshire churchgoers left the muse "violently sweated"<sup>3</sup> but not before she had been invoked to recount with epic precision the names, the occupations and frequently the morals, and the separate overthrows of the combatants.

Fielding's novels present an interesting transitional stage in the progression from poetic to prose predominance, especially since he was aware of the significance of his writing; this was not Richardson, cautiously proceeding from a collection of model letters to an epistolary novel, which even he himself was reluctant to admit to be fiction. Fielding unhesitatingly acknowledged his classical and contemporary influences and his own aspirations to write "a great epic of the road" in the picaresque tradition. Homer's importance for his style, atmosphere and voyaging heroes was paramount. Fielding's novels were modern odysseys, complete with heroic and amorous adventures and a patient heroine to whom the wanderer eventually won his way.

In Hight's view, the debt of the novel to the classics is twofold; it owes much of its distinctive quality to the growing together of two classical currents, that of Greek romance, with its episodic story line and its interest in young love, travel and adventure, disguises and coincidences, and the Greco-Roman epic with its bold construction, large scale proliferation of characters, political and historical

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Fielding, Tom Jones I, intro. A.R. Humphreys (New York, 1964), p.127.

profundity and sense of "hidden mysteries that make human destiny more than its individual adventures and private lives".<sup>4</sup>

The role of the classics in the wider sphere of literature was one which was challenged throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The conflict between the supporters of the ancients and the moderns found expression in the Battle of the Books, a debate which raged in England and the Continent. Homer's standing suffered particularly, since he lay open to all the charges levelled by the moderns. He was the supreme example of a pagan author: to the Christian moderns, then, he was surpassed by the contemporary writers simply because they had the advantage of superior emotions and themes inspired by Christianity. An interesting reversal of this condemnation appeared in the nineteenth century's praise of Homer for this very paganism, and Yeats among the modern writers is a representative of those for whom the non-Christian Homeric spirit was a major attraction.

Swift's part in the battle included the writing of A Tale of a Tub, which he presented satirically from the point of view of the over-enthusiastic modern. In Section V he examined

" a certain Author called Homer, in whom, tho' otherwise a Person not without some Abilities, and for an Ancient, of a tolerable Genius; I have discovered many gross Errors, which are not to be forgiven his very Ashes, if by chance

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<sup>4</sup> op. cit., p.343.

any of them are left. For whereas, we are assured, he design'd his Work for a compleat Body of all Knowledge Human, Divine, Political, and Mechanick; it is manifest, he hath wholly neglected some, and been very imperfect in the rest".<sup>5</sup>

He went on to cite Homer's omission of recent inventions and discoveries, and "his gross Ignorance in the Common Laws of this Realm and in the Doctrine as well as Discipline of the Church of England". Swift was ridiculing the moderns' claim that the classical writers were inferior because their knowledge did not match that of the eighteenth century. Obviously scientific advances had been made, but the ability to create great works of art was not a quality which improved with the passing of the centuries.

Reverting to a more direct attack on the moderns Swift wrote The Battle of the Books, an Homeric conflict in which Homer himself "appeared at the Head of the Cavalry" and overthrew moderns in true heroic style. This triumph in arms did not reflect Homer's real fate in the eighteenth century. He suffered most on the grounds of taste. The dramatic conventions of the Greek and Roman writers, such as the intervention of the gods, were mocked; even Fielding found supernatural involvement in human affairs inappropriate to serious writing and suitable only for burlesque.

Further sport was offered to the moderns by the many inconsistencies in Greek and Roman history and legends, which had arisen through the tendency for characteristics

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings, ed. and intro. Ricardo Quintana (New York, 1958), p.317.

of little-known local deities to be attributed to the more famous figures. The resultant confusion could easily be made to seem absurd, if the myths were read unsympathetically.

Most damaging to Homer's reputation was the accusation that his subject matter and his language were vulgar. Eighteenth century sensibility could not support any reference to low class concerns such as domestic animals and household occupations. It was inexcusable for a princess like Nausicaa to interest herself in the washing, for a dunghill to be known to exist at the gate of Odysseus' palace, or for Ajax to be compared with a donkey. Besides this, Homer's heroes had no eighteenth century sense of propriety: they gave way frequently to violent emotion, they lowered themselves to physical labour, and endured ludicrous indignities. Such behaviour was unacceptable, particularly to the ladies, whose opinion counted for much and who were capricious in their establishment of standards of judgment.

In The Rape of the Lock Pope transformed the Homeric style into the mock-heroic, in order to satirise the very affectations which have been seen to denigrate Homer. The techniques in the poem related back to Milton, through the use of evocative passages which echo the Iliad, and forward to Joyce's Ulysses in that both writers used the

heroic epic as a contrast to the mediocrity of the present.

The most solid labour of Pope's life was spent in preparing his Homeric translations. The Iliad, published from 1715-20, and the Odyssey, from 1725-6, brought him fame and wealth, although as the scholar Bentley said, it was "a very pretty poem, but you must not call it Homer". His poor Greek made him dependent on earlier English translations and occasioned frequent mistakes, as well as an un-Homeric quality which possibly was responsible for its popularity in an age largely unsympathetic to the true Homer. Pope's reasons for praising him indicate the elements which the Augustans favoured. A.R. Humphreys in his assessment of the literary scene<sup>6</sup> emphasises that the desire for order was even then subordinated to an acknowledgment of the energy of creative genius. Influenced by Longinus' treatise On The Sublime, Pope, in his preface to the translation of the Iliad, praised Homer's "unequalled fire and rapture" which made his epic "a wild paradise" in which everything was animated.

While this sentiment seemed to have affinities with the Romantic outlook, the peculiarly Augustan poetic language, which favoured "the feather'd choir" and "the wingy swarm" at the expense of the birds and the bees was given Homeric

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6 Ed. Ford, Boris. Pelican Guide to English Literature, Volume 4. (Aylesbury, 1957).

sanction by Pope's interpretation of epic diction:

"To throw the language more out of prose, Homer seems to have affected the compound-epithets. This was a sort of composition peculiarly proper to poetry, not only as it heightened the diction, but as it assisted and filled the numbers with greater sound and pomp, and likewise conduced in some measure to thicken the images."

This obscurity of language was one aspect of the classicists against which the Romantic rebelled.

The contrast implied in the titles "classical" and "romantic" has given the false impression that the poets of the epoch 1765-1825 despised and rejected the literature of Greece and Rome. In actuality, the majority of the great writers of the period were far more learned in classical literature than their predecessors, and more successful in capturing and reproducing its meaning. Not content merely to enshrine classical legends and philosophy unmodified in their works, they reinterpreted what they found with a different emphasis and deeper understanding. The true basis of the reaction against the classics was a repugnance for the baroque habit of believing that the presence of a mythical character or classical allusion was sufficient to justify the poem; too often the classicists relied on a hackneyed image or an over-worked stylistic device, and both the Revolutionary poet and his audience were impatient with the misuse.

Higher cites Wordsworth's assessment of the deterioration



of his immediate predecessors' imaginative power and his faith in the enduring value of myth:

"No doubt the hacknied and lifeless use into which mythology fell towards the close of the 17th century, and which continued through the 18th, disgusted the general reader with all allusion to it in modern verse; and though, in deference to this disgust, and also in a measure participating in it, I abstained in my earlier writings from all introduction of pagan fable, surely, even in its humble form, it may ally itself with real sentiment."

- note to Ode to Lycoris (1817).

Anti-classicism in the Romantics was, in effect, directed towards the classicists rather than towards the classics.

The baroque poets had taken the particular attributes of the classical authors whom they most admired and from their works had deduced rigid principles of composition, which were held to so strongly that their absence from another classical writer appeared as a condemnation of his work rather than a flaw in the classicists' system. The Romantics rejected the seventeenth and early eighteenth century interpretation of Greco-Roman literary ideals; they favoured the free expression of emotion rather than restraint, preferred improvisation to polished workmanship, and regarded symmetry within an artistic whole as an artificial, unnatural demand.

The impression of anti-classicism was also conveyed by the Romantics' preoccupation with a widened scope of human experience, as a result of the politically and socially revolutionary character of their era. Suddenly made

available as subjects were political upheavals, medieval and Eastern mysteries, folk poetry and peasant life, wild nature, and sinister human depths, in contrast to the ordered baroque age, which limited itself chiefly to classical myth and history, human psychology and fundamental philosophical problems. The Romantic expansion of horizons could be misinterpreted as a disinclination to accept classical themes.

Nevertheless, the Romantic period is remarkable for its role as complement to the Renaissance: it marked a Hellenic revival just as the earlier movement had explored the Latin heritage. Men of the Renaissance would readily quote from fifth-rate Latin poets, yet neglected even first-rate Greek poets like Homer. This attitude was now reversed and it was Homer's reputation which gained the most. From being disparaged by the eighteenth century as being coarse and crude, he was now celebrated as natural and moving. The belief in the virtues of the original genius and the poetry of nature gave the literature of Greece a greater prestige than that of Rome, which was largely derived from it. More attention was paid to subject matter and historical background than previously had been done.

For the Romantic poets and thinkers, as for Boccaccio five centuries earlier, whole-hearted admiration of the Greco-Roman world meant the rejection of Christianity. No longer obscured by medieval incomprehension or eighteenth

century mockery, the Homeric gods and goddesses were to the Romantics real and changeless embodiments of the human personality and its aspirations. The great figure of the Romantic scholar and neo-paganist was Shelley. Like Milton he devoted himself to the classics, until their characteristic expressions, conceptions and structure became absorbed into his own thought. Homer was his favourite author. He constantly reread the epics, and in 1818 translated seven of the Homeric hymns into English. His poetry did now show direct Homeric imitation, but contained an influence which can scarcely be separated from Shelley's own character. His definition of Homer's appeal to him expressed the ideals of an era:

"As a poet, Homer must be acknowledged to excel Shakespeare in the truth, the harmony, the sustained grandeur, the satisfying completeness of his images, their exact fitness to the illustration, and to that to which they belong."  
 - from Essay on . . . the Athenians.

Shelley's poetry was the product of an excellent classical education. Two of his contemporaries illustrate the contrasting effects of a full but stultifying education, and an incomplete, yet stimulating contact with the classics. Byron remembered his schooldays for their "drilled dull lesson", since he encountered teaching in which syntax and scansion were emphasized at the expense of literary value. A bad education therefore kept him from experiencing the full influence of the classical writers, and he was often happier

mocking the methods of teaching - Don Juan's expurgated texts - or treating the classical authors and ideals frivolously:

"And glory long has made the sages smile;  
 'Tis something, nothing, words, illusion, wind -  
 Depending more upon the historian's style  
 Than on the name a person leaves behind:  
 Troy owes to Homer what whist owes to Hoyle."  
 - Don Juan, Canto III, 90.

Byron refused to go on studying the classics after his schooling had ended, but the knowledge which he had gained inevitably was part of his personality. He felt strongly the allure of the Greek understanding of man and nature, and he deeply regretted the decay of Greek civilization, to the extent of dying for the liberation of Greece.

Keats' circumstances were virtually the opposite: coming from a poor family he had, like Shakespeare, to learn his classical mythology second-hand, since he knew no Greek. He had, however, the advantage that his desire for knowledge was undampened by the contemporary teaching methods. He was especially moved by Homer, whose insights extended his awareness of the unexplored possibilities opening before him. Unfortunately, gaps in his classical knowledge injured his poetry: he lacked a grasp of philosophy, of poetic structure and of the sense of tragedy which a study of the Greek playwrights could have given him. The critical reviewers did not restrain their expressions of contempt:

"From his prototype Hunt, John Keats has acquired a sort of vague idea, that the Greeks were a most tasteful people, and that no mythology can be so finely adapted for the purposes of poetry as

theirs. . . ; no man, whose mind has ever been imbued with the smallest knowledge or feeling of classical history, could ever have stopped to profane and vulgarise every association in the manner which has been adopted by this 'son of promise'."

- from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. III  
No. XVII

Keats was in a sense closer to the modern poets than to his better educated contemporaries, because he came to the characters and themes of antiquity with the fresh eyes and enthusiasm of the amateur, attracted by the images which suited his personal outlook. In just this way Yeats, Pound and Joyce came into early contact with the Iliad and the Odyssey, so that from that point their writings and their views of life were inescapably bound up with the epics.

The state of classical teaching throughout the nineteenth century is of considerable importance: upon it depended not only the cast of the poet's mind and the content of his poetry, but also the receptivity of the reading public to classical subjects. While the available information about Greece and Rome increased throughout the century, the distribution of classical knowledge declined, after an initial rise. Fewer children learnt the classics at school and fewer students chose classical courses at the universities. For those fortunate enough to attend a good private school and to proceed to a good public school, the age was a golden one, however. Much of the credit for these good schools belonged to the great schoolmasters of the

century, who revitalized the system from within. M.L. Clarke<sup>7</sup> claims that "it is doubtful whether so high a level of scholarship, in Greek at any rate, as was reached in the nineteenth century was ever attained at so early an age before the nineteenth century". Nevertheless, a decline in the overall standard of classical education was apparent.

Just as the social and political changes had introduced new themes for the poets, so the rapid advance of science, industrialism and international trade created new subjects which insisted upon a place in the school curriculum. The spirit of the age was utilitarian and the "mercantile and trading classes" had no use for Greek and little for Latin. Where the grammar schools failed to provide a modern education, they turned to the private schools which were prepared to adapt themselves to what the age demanded. The grammar schools, already declining, lost ground further to the public schools as the added convenience of railways supplied means of transport to pupils who might otherwise have been educated locally. Classical scholarship thus tended to be concentrated in a comparatively small number of schools, and its circle of influence lessened correspondingly.

With the introduction of universal education it became impracticable to try to teach difficult subjects like Greek and Latin to the large numbers in the schools. Previously children had begun to study these subjects at the age of

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<sup>7</sup> M.L. Clarke. *Classical Education in Britain: 1500-1900*, (Cambridge, 1959), p. 84.

nine or ten, but the tendency to wait until the pupils were older meant a diminished familiarity with the classics and a generally lower standard.

Classical teaching itself was bad in many cases. Teachers often were lazy and uninterested; others were absorbed in their own research into obtruse branches of the subject. Scholarly knowledge was advanced, but basic education in the classics suffered. The examination system and the multiplication of scholarships and prizes led to concentration on displays of memory and accuracy, whereas earlier generations had been accustomed to achieving a flexible acquaintanceship with the languages, which enabled them to converse and compose freely in the manner of their classical models. The ethos of the nineteenth century was largely responsible for a new attitude to all education: it was to be exact and pleasureless, with the ultimate aim of discipline. Classical literature was taught with an over-emphasis on precision and was viewed as a science, not an art.

In the universities of the first half of the century the level of scholarship was low. Dull and bright students were taught together, so that even those who had had a good schooling were often held back in their development. The examinations produced a stereotyped course of study, and Homer was one of the authors who disappeared almost completely from the curriculum. The reforms in the universities which

followed the Royal Commissions of 1850 were instrumental in achieving improved scholarship and instruction and it is significant that Homer was restored to favour at this point: the Oxford examination statutes required twelve books of Homer to be presented.

Many of the Victorian writers were deeply-read classical scholars: Tennyson, Arnold, Swinburne, London and Browning. Good classical education was stimulated by the popularity of the vernacular authors whose classical knowledge was part of their reputation. Tennyson's "Ulysses" reflects the poet's genius for foreseeing the coming popularity of a theme and providing the public with his treatment of it. Ogilvie<sup>8</sup> illustrates this point with Tennyson's "The Princess" written in 1847 on women's education and "In Memoriam" in 1850 on religion and geology, besides the celebration of Britain's military undertakings in "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and "The Siege of Lucknow". Similarly he made ready use of Homeric allusions and wrote two poems of specifically epic character: "The Lotos Eaters" (1833) and "Ulysses" in 1842. In the latter, however, Homer's hero was not the predominant inspiration: Tennyson's protagonist was basically a combination of Byronic discontent and romanticism, with the doomed search for forbidden knowledge of Dante's Ulysses. W.B. Stanford<sup>9</sup> sums him up as "a pagan patron saint for a

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8 R.M. Ogilvie, *Latin and Greek: A History of the Influence of the Classics on English Life: 1600-1918.* (1964).

9 W.B. Stanford. *The Ulysses Theme.* (Oxford, 1954).



new age of scientific optimism and colonial expansion". The use of Homer's hero may have kept the original epic in the consciousness of the ordinary reader, but the Homeric spirit was not present.

Like Tennyson, Matthew Arnold attempted to transfer the great heroic qualities to English epic writing: besides the more explicitly Homeric poems, Tennyson echoed the Greek poet in his Arthurian legends, while Arnold gave Homeric treatment to Norse and Persian myths. He successfully evoked the half-primitive yet noble nature of his scenes and characters, and like Milton included several close adaptations of Homer and Vergil, but lacked the ability to capture the spirit and style of the Homeric epic.

Arnold played a more direct role in elevating the status of Homer by correcting another in the line of misleading interpretations of his essential attributes. The Romantic revival of folk-poetry replaced Pope's image of Homer as a court poet in a rather primitive society with the equally fallacious concept of "Homer the Rhymer". Translations to match this approach were in jaunty ballad metre with deliberately quaint and old-fashioned language. F.W. Newman's "ditty-measure" translation in 1856 goaded Arnold into a vigorous denunciation of the prevalent underestimation of Homer in his lectures "On Translating Homer" and his essay "On Translating Homer: Last Words" (1861-2). As a result

the false parallel between Homer and the ballads was destroyed. By putting him on a level with Dante, Shakespeare and Milton and comparing him with the nineteenth century poets, Arnold raised the standard of Homeric criticism and protested at the attitude which reduced the poems from consideration as great art to regard as useful collections of facts about early Greece and museums of archaic grammar.

The proliferation of Homeric translations in the twenty years preceding 1877 is indicative of a sharp rise in the demand for a means of access to the poems. Twelve complete versions of the Iliad appeared in this period, in comparison to only one per generation before 1854. After 1877 Andrew Lang dominated the field with prose instead of verse translations. These were immensely successful, despite the inevitable loss in imaginative power and memorability.

The utilitarian character of the Victorian age was demonstrated by the two philosophers whose popularity was at its height during the period: Plato and Thucydides. A change was inevitable as Victorian gave way to Edwardian; in any case the cult of these two writers was bound to be short-lived because of their difficulty and their being in prose instead of the more popular poetry. When the change came it was startling in its suddenness and completeness. In the eighteenth century it was Pope's version of

Homer, rather than Homer himself, that was well-known; Homer was little read at Oxford during the first half of the nineteenth century and as late as the 1870s was not read at all at Winchester or Shrewsbury. Philosophy and history occupied the foreground until, within a few decades, Homer was resurrected and reinstated in the public consciousness.

Schliemann's archeological discoveries played a fortuitous but vital part in this revival. Homer's poems had long been attractive as remote stories of an heroic, mythological Never-Never Land and the late Victorian age itself was increasingly attuned to the characteristic Homeric ideals, but Schliemann revealed that such civilization had actually existed, and produced beautiful, tangible relics of the Golden Age. His excavations at Troy from 1870-3 and 1878-9, and at Mycenae in 1874-6, followed by those at Orchomenus and Tiryns in the early 1880s provided the missing element for the English: for a sceptical age there was material evidence of the reality of the Homeric world.

England was the first country to recognize the significance of Schliemann's discoveries and to welcome him with acclaim. The educational system was stimulated and Homer, who had previously been at best a leisure pastime to be abandoned for more weighty authors as one progressed, was now studied in earnest to the highest forms. Eton,

Harrow and Rugby set the trend, together with the more progressive grammar schools. New sciences - philology, archeology and anthropology - produced material to give depth to the texts, so that available information on Homer increased rapidly. In his book, Landmarks of Homeric Study (London, 1890), p.2, W.E. Gladstone declared the necessity of a study of "Homerology" "as a distinct branch of ancient science".

In the universities too Homer was studied seriously. At Oxford he was prescribed reading and Jebb in 1887 encouraged a similar respect for him at Cambridge. Scholars examined the composition of the Homeric epics and generally inclined to the now discredited theory that one man could scarcely have written either or both the Iliad and the Odyssey. Good texts and accurate editions were assisted by the discoveries of papyri in the Nile Valley, and photography made possible the circulation of versions previously jealously protected in European libraries. Classical scholarship was strongly orientated towards Homer.

Ogilvie provides illuminating examples of the wide diffusion of interest in Homer. The educated classes like Gladstone wrote scholarly books on Homer; from Karachi T.E. Lawrence wrote "The Odyssey goes with me, always, to every camp, for I love it." Writing in 1964, Ogilvie refers to a "recent" Times study of Pleasures in Reading, in

which a surprising number of contributors brought up in the Edwardian age listed Homer among their hobbies. He was not just an affectation of the educated man: women too were attracted to the poems, though usually restricted to translations, and in 1892 Samuel Butler was requested to deliver his lecture on "The Humour of Homer" to the Working Men's College.

The characteristics of the Homeric civilization and the qualities which it demanded of its heroes appealed to English society as a whole. Ogilvie demonstrates that circumstances made the Edwardians particularly susceptible to Homer's attraction. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries before the Great War form a settled period in which the amassing of wealth and Empire was largely achieved and the impetus towards social reform was dying out. Qualities of leadership were more and more admired for their own sake. A society devoted to the organization and maintenance of its empire demanded heroes upon whom its aspirations could focus. The firmly-fixed class system meant that most could hope to participate only vicariously in the glamour of heroism and adventure. Like the Homeric system, attention was given only to the rich and powerful. The ordinary soldier scarcely existed, a bias which was to be questioned and rejected by the war poets of 1916-18. To the Edwardians, good birth was an

asset and wealth an advantage, but a man still had to prove his personal ability before taking his place among the best: just as, in Homeric times, a weak leader could be challenged and overthrown by a stronger man, even if he had less intrinsic right to position.

The heroic pursuit of honour was a characteristic predominant in the Edwardian gentleman. He believed in the established code of behaviour expected of him and his actions were judged more by their appropriateness to the dignity of a great man than by their moral value alone. His aim was not to examine and extend his own personality or to fulfil a role of service to his country, but rather to attain a position in which due regard would be accorded him.

The parallels between the Homeric and Edwardian hero are multiple: each held the foregoing views on wealth and position, each felt the obligation to stand by a friend, and to defend one's honour at all costs, and each was dependent on the sea. In the Edwardian world of heroes Homer struck a responsive chord within the society, and outside it, expressed its collective values. The Edwardian thus had the moral support of the epics; he also had in many cases a direct physical contact with the Homeric lands. This was an era in which Britain held Egypt and India, and travellers explored the intervening regions, identifying themselves with Odysseus, who had "seen the cities of many men and learnt their ways". As Ogilvie proves by a study of three

novelists selected because of the likelihood of their preserving unquestioningly an accurate record of Edwardian views, the Homeric cast of life was so deeply established that even the popular novel was filled with characters and allusions drawn from the Greek epics.

As a better understanding of Homer was reached, there was a reaction against Lang's translations. It was felt that Lang had made Homer too stately and reserved and had concealed the violence, humour and selfish arrogance which made up the hero. Samuel Butler led this reaction, offering his own refreshing but extravagant contributions to Homeric interpretation: "The Humour of Homer" in 1892 and The Authoress of the Odyssey in 1897. He accompanied his theories with his own translations of the Iliad (1898) and the Odyssey (1900) in an effort to present Homer in plain, readable prose.

T.E. Lawrence belonged with the Edwardians in spirit if not by right of contemporaneity: his translation of the Odyssey was not written until 1928-32 but his Edwardian values relate him to the earlier period. His adventurous life and his lifelong love of Homer's poetry fitted him uniquely for the task of translation. The result was energetic and swift-moving, but the vocabulary was weak. It was often affected and sometimes ludicrously false - Robert Fagles in the Twentieth Century Views essays on Homer

sums up its tone as one of "expertise that was at best attractively adept, but at worst full of the arrogance of the insecure. Lawrence could never call a spade a spade; it had to come out an adze or a mattock or an ash-hafted carbon-steel shovel".

In poetry the development of the Georgian style owed much to a second influence of Lang: the picture of Homer which was conveyed by the translations in which he was involved. Butcher and Lang's Odyssey and Lang, Leaf and Myer's Iliad captured much of the heroic spirit, but the diction gave a falsely old-fashioned and homely air. These were believed by the Georgian poets to be the true Homeric qualities and they instilled into their poetry the "natural sympathy, emotional warmth and moral innocence" which were held to be peculiarly Homer. Georgian poetry was simple, unsophisticated, short and unelaborate, but paradoxically was more Homeric than the lengthy offerings of earlier nineteenth century epic imitators. The reason was that the poets were so deeply immersed in the Homeric way of life that brief allusions or classical similes were all that was needed to arouse powerful and deep-rooted emotions.

The atmosphere of joyous acceptance which greeted the outbreak of the Great War was a climactic manifestation of the Homeric temper of the age. The pre-war generation was steeped in heroic idealism and battle was the ultimate



ground of self-fulfilment. Julian Grenfell's "Into Battle" is the quintessence of Homer, an inevitable expression of the pervasive mood; he was not merely indulging in what D.J. Enright<sup>10</sup> saw as "simple-minded romanticism". Even Wilfred Owen, whose later war poems held a deep hatred of warfare and a resentment of those whose unbending pride had brought it about, showed in an early poem, "The Seed", that abstract ideals and theories of inevitability or regeneration in history were common to all those who had not learnt through their own experiences the horrors of such a war:

War broke. And now the winter of the world  
With perishing great darkness closes in.

. . .  
For after Spring had bloomed in early Greece,  
And Summer blazed to perfect strength in Rome,  
There fell a slow grand age, a harvest-home, 11  
Quietly ripening rich with all increase .

But now the exigent winter and the need  
Of sowing for new spring, and flesh for seed.

Patent success in empire-building and buoyant satisfaction with England's strength and status created in the pre-war generation the same feeling of playing a part in history, and inspired the selfless but anachronistic crusading spirit again expressed by Owen:

The soil is safe, for widow and waif,  
And for the soul of England,  
Because their bodies men vouchsafe  
To save the soul of England.  
- "Ballad of Purchase Moneys".

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10 Ed. Ford, Boris. The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol.7. (Aylesbury, 1961), p.163.

11 The brackets enclose words deleted but not replaced in the manuscript.

The classically derived enthusiasm which filled the educated young men of the 1914-15 period was embodied in Rupert Brooke, with his characteristic joy at the prospect of re-enacting the Homeric epic by meeting the Turks "on the plains of Troy". The tribute written by Edward Marsh on Brooke's death during that campaign arose from the same desire to establish parallels between the heroes of myth and the contemporary soldiers:

"Here then, in the island where Theseus was buried, and whence the young Achilles and the young Pyrrhus were called to Troy, Rupert Brooke died."

These were not isolated examples: Patrick Shaw-Stewart read the Iliad on his way to Gallipoli in 1915 and consciously identified himself with his Greek predecessors; Charles Lister on the same campaign wrote:

"It is the most exhilarating feeling to be again on the sea of ancient civilizations and dream of the galleys of Carthage and Venice - or further back still - of the raft of Odysseus."

Even in the trenches the Edwardian heritage still bore up the soldiers for a time. The Homeric heroes were so much a part of them that they were able to sustain themselves by imagining their situation to be that of the Iliad; this literary world could become more real, because more natural to them, than the unbearable external world of trench warfare. Sir Ronald Storrs wrote:

"Throughout the war I never saw one tired man refreshing himself with a scientific treatise on a mathematical problem; whereas there were many besides Lawrence transported far beyond their fatigue and anxieties by following those of Patroclus or Odysseus."

The Great War was the climax of the Homeric era: it gave a generation its sought-after testing ground and its chance for glory, but it also ended a dream. War was no longer a small-scale encounter where courage and skill decided the victor; glory was hard to find in a rat-infested trench. An Homeric way of life could not withstand twentieth century impersonality and mechanization, and the second part of the war produced poetry which was starkly contemporary. Romantic myth was purged from the consciousness of those who survived into the new awareness of war. Ronald Knox, revisiting the battlefields in 1930 offered a revealing contrast to Edward Marsh's sentiments on the death of Brooke:

"The great Pan is dead, and the world of which he is the symbol; we can never recapture it. And I knew that when I saw the Hellespont it did not remind me of the ship Argo, nor of the agony of Troy, nor of Xerxes' bridge, nor of the Spartan victory at Aegospotami. . . It was peopled for me instead by those who fought and died there fifteen years ago, men of my own country and of my own speech."

The rejection of the epic tradition was inevitable for the poets of the trenches, because the ethos which it had produced in the Edwardians provided a screen which was used to conceal the horrors to which the young men had been committed. The gap between the civilian and the soldier could only be narrowed by the brutal revelations of those who had

"Walked eye-deep in hell  
believing in old men's lies."

The soldier-poet had to discredit the long out-dated idealism which for him had died in the 1915 campaign, but which lived on still in the "patriots" at home who would

"tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori."

- Wilfred Owen. "Dulce et Decorum est."

With the abnegation of the classical doctrine of glorification of war went the temporary loss of the great qualities of the epic. The immediate stimulus to tell of "the pity of war", and the very circumstances of writing precluded the Wordsworthian expression of "emotion recollected in tranquillity", which could perhaps have given perspective and lasting significance to poetry which, although moving, could not attain the universal relevance of "the Waste Land" or "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". To the war poets their experience was unique; they themselves were isolated, able to connect nothing with nothing. Siegfried Sassoon seemed in fact to identify an attachment to Homer with the decayed country aristocracy when in a later poem, "Reynardism Revisited", he visualised the Last Day, on which would be seen:

"green shires degenerate  
With unmolested poultry;  
    . . .  
And British foxes, mythical as Homer  
Centuries extinct, their odysseys forgotten."

It is Sassoon's sole Homeric reference; for him, as for W.H. Auden, the post-war era can find a place for Homer only in satire.

Nevertheless the enriching power of mythology and the epic tradition of Homer could not be denied, or excluded from modern literature. The extraordinary conditions of the Great War produced a permanent shift of sensibility in society and in literature. Yet its rejection was directed towards what Homer had come to stand for, not basically towards the man and his works themselves.

Significantly, one of the more unusual progeny of the First World War was In Parenthesis by David Jones, published in 1937 with a profoundly mythological basis. The time which elapsed between the action and the retelling approximated more ideally to that of the epic poet composing on subjects from days long past, and the inevitable gains were those of perspective, objectivity and a more carefully worked out universality in relating the meaning of wartime experiences to tradition and to the present. Jones incorporated some of Homer's time-tested characteristics: he used the celebrated time-references (which Fielding paraded so effectively) in order to contrast calm, everyday events with the unique, agonizing moments of the soldier's life; he adapted the epic list of combattants and the epic boost delivered before battle commenced. As a war poem prompted by the same circumstances which compelled Owen and Sassoon to write, In Parenthesis illustrates convincingly the tradition in British literature in which Homer's epics have played a constant role.

Poetry was stripped bare in the trenches of France; its continuance thus beyond such unique circumstances could only have meant permanent impoverishment and decline. Fortunately the modern period saw a remythologising of literature through a combination of revolutionary reinterpretations of myth and man's dependence upon it.

## II.

"It is therefore to be expected of the poet that he will resort to mythology in order to give his experience its most fitting expression."

- C.G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, (London, 1933), p.189.

The Hellenic Revival in the Romantic Period asserted the supremacy in literature of Greek life and culture over the rival Roman civilization. That this re-instatement of the Greek pantheon was no temporary enthusiasm is illustrated by Douglas Bush<sup>1</sup> in his comprehensive Appendix of Mythological poems which covers English literature from the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. It demonstrates the continued presence of subjects drawn from myth at all levels of creature writing. In the schools, however, the decline of classical studies affected Greek even more than Latin, so that Greek came to lack general currency, even while it continued to exert an influence on literature. In other centuries, like the Elizabethan era when the whole populace took a lively interest in literary activity, the unfamiliarity of the subject matter might have seemed daunting, but when inherited by the moderns it appeared only as another indication of the gulf between the writer and the public, a gulf which was so far accepted as inevitable that the literary man

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry, (New York, 1957).

consciously visualised himself as directing his thoughts towards others of his group and not to the public at large.

The presence of Homer as an enduringly potent force in modern literature is related to this revaluation of the Greek classics, but, more significantly, is an aspect of a wider revitalization of mythology, which was stimulated by a unique understanding of the primitive classical world. The rise of new sciences during the nineteenth century seemed to toll the death-knell of the classics and therefore of the myths which were expressed in them. Strangely, the intellectual activity produced information instead which gave fresh meaning to what had earlier been judged as compelling but ultimately fictitious material. Through this new knowledge not merely the survival, but the vigorous activity of myth in the modern imagination was assured.

In the preceding chapter I have attempted to trace the fortunes of Homer throughout English literature. The modern period sees the confluence of this stream, the Homeric subject matter, with that of the reinterpretations of mythology which are peculiar to this century. The culmination of this fortuitous union of influences is the work of three major figures of the twentieth century, W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and James Joyce, whose imaginations were caught by the appropriateness of Homer's epic material, in the light of mythology's new significance, to their personal examinations of the individual



and his relation to his time. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the elements which combined and interacted to give fresh life to mythology in the modern age. The succeeding chapters will deal in depth with the debts of Yeats and Pound to Homer's influence. James Joyce's Ulysses presents the most obvious example of a twentieth-century work in the Homeric tradition. The very title proclaims the basic identification of Odysseus with his modern Dublin counterpart, while Stuart Gilbert's painstaking explication<sup>2</sup> of the relationship between the novel and its epic model has its origins in Joyce's own written guide to the parallels of episode, character and theme which are woven into the book.<sup>3</sup> The extent of Joyce's role in reviving the popularity of Homer in the modern period may be seen in the theory that the imbalance in sales of E.V. Rieu's translations in favour of the Odyssey is possibly traceable to the interest aroused by the publication of Ulysses. The Homeric elements in Joyce's novel have, however, been subjected to so extensive an examination that a recapitulation within the bounds of this thesis seems redundant. I have therefore chosen to concentrate upon the Homeric aspects of the work of the two poets, Yeats and Pound, who in company with Joyce demonstrate the impact of Homer on Modern literature.

2 Stuart Gilbert, James Joyce's Ulysses ( London 1930, revised 1952).

3 Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (London, 1966), p. 535.

The excitement generated by Schliemann's archeological discoveries in the 1870's and 1880's retained its impetus beyond the Homeric enthusiasm of the Edwardians. Sir Arthur Evans continued to excavate in the Mediterranean world at the turn of the century and his explorations in Crete added to the evidence supporting the actuality of the Mycenaean civilization. The influence of archeological discoveries is reflected by Ezra Pound's interest in the Minoans, a curiosity which was so far from amateur that Guy Davenport, examining Pound's use of the Persephone myth,<sup>4</sup> describes him as working "well ahead of the world's knowledge of Knossan art", with the exception of Sir Arthur Evans' own study Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult. "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" was published a year before Evans' The Palace of Minos (1921), yet it indicates an awareness of the "Minoan undulation" and describes

"A basket-work of braids which seem as if they were  
Spun in King Minos' hall

From metal, or intractable amber;"

- "Medallion", Collected Shorter Poems (London, 1968),  
p.222.

Archeology encouraged classical scholarship with its intimations of unexplored reservoirs of knowledge. The intellectual activity surrounding the works of Homer kept them in the forefront of the educated mind, because their significance was constantly being expanded and modified.

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<sup>4</sup> Guy Davenport, "Persephone's Ezra", Arion, Vol.7, No.1, (Austin, Texas, Summer 1968).

Particular attention was paid to a study of the composition of the epic, through the examination of comparable sagas and heroic poems. Andrew Lang's Homer and the Epic of 1893 was succeeded in the post-war period by Gilbert Murray's The Rise of the Greek Epic (1924), which aimed at putting the Iliad and the Odyssey in their proper historical perspective. Maurice Bowra followed this with Tradition and Design in the Iliad in 1930, while Milman Parry revolutionized conventional views of epic composition by his consideration of formulaic material, published from 1929. The whole period showed a vigorous expansion of Homeric re-interpretation.

The stimulus of archeological revelations was felt by the rapidly developing new science of anthropology. The intellectual atmosphere of the nineteenth century was particularly receptive to controversy surrounding the theories of the nature of early man and Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species in 1859 and The Descent of Man in 1871 had the two-fold effect of creating disciples and opponents who related Darwin's call for evolutionary treatment in the sciences of man to their own specific fields, and of attracting public attention to the ferment of speculation in these sciences.

From 1856 to 1900 a debate over the origins of myth raged between Andrew Lang and Max Müller, whose long essay on "Comparative Mythology" in 1856 reorientated previous approaches through the application of the science of

comparative philology and the study of Vedic Sanscrit. Max Muller claimed that primitive Man had constructed his pantheon around the sun, the dawn and the sky and that equations between the Vedic and the Greek gods explained the barbaric elements of Greek classical mythology. By a "disease of language" the original significance of the gods' names had been forgotten and new stories had been invented to satisfy later curiosity.

Andrew Lang, whose role of translator of Homer has been examined in the first chapter, was influenced by Darwin's theories and by the early anthropological research of Edward Tylor, which linked the theory of biological evolution to the hypothesis of human evolution. Lang gathered together his essays illustrating the anthropological method and criticising the philological approach in Custom and Myth in 1884 and made his chief contribution with a two-volume study in 1887, Myth, Ritual and Religion. The controversy was a persistent one, with side issues fought bitterly by devotees of one or other scholar, but with the close of the century the sun set on Max Muller and solar mythology. After more than forty years of argument philological mythology rapidly gave way to the anthropological approach.

Popular knowledge of the science of anthropology was brought to the educated reader by Sir James Frazer, who combined Tylor's belief in evolutionary survivals with W.R. Smith's comparative religious method, which was derived

through Montesquieu from the German philologists. In 1890 Frazer published the first volume of The Golden Bough, a development from the study of a strange priesthood at Nemi, in association with the concept of the slain and resurrected god. Volume succeeded volume over the next twenty-five years and by the third and final edition in 1915 Frazer had achieved a synthesis of Tylor's rationalist view that myth was an invented explanation for a custom whose real origin had been forgotten, with the belief that ritual tended to diminish into remnants which survived, but were no longer serious parts of the community life. By 1915 Frazer had come to see myth not as a consciously-devised rationalisation but as the actual dwindling or later form of the ritual.

Over the period of the publication of The Golden Bough studies of myth and literature from an anthropological viewpoint proliferated. The leading figures in the early decades of the twentieth century, Jane Harrison, A.B. Cook, F.M. Cornford and Gilbert Murray examined folklore and survivals in terms of the discoveries of the related science of archeology. Jane Harrison in particular was inspired by the implications of Cretan relics and in 1912 she published Themis, a brilliant expression of the anthropological theory of the evolution through rite to religion, literature, art and symbolism, during which process the original significance

is lost and compensatory adaptations are introduced to make the misunderstood survivals intelligible to contemporary minds. Before 1912 there had been individual examinations of ritual, but these had concentrated on the area of children's games and nursery rhymes, or on biblical interpretations in terms of ritual or initiation. After Themis the scope was widened and the theory was applied to literature: Gilbert Murray, for instance, studied a source common to Shakespeare and Aeschylus in his lecture "Hamlet and Orestes" in 1914, and Jessie L. Weston introduced the twentieth century and T.S. Eliot to the Fisher King and his barren kingdom in her investigation of the bases of the Grail legends in distant fertility cults.

Anthropology aroused an intellectually stimulating movement in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century. Modern literature could not help but reflect the excitement which was generated, as controversies raged and volume after volume of new material revealed unsuspected depths in the primitive way of life. Mythology could no longer be treated as a collection of pretty stories, a store-house of decorative characters and images. Euhemeristic dismissal of mythical beings as deified or glorified historical figures, and Romantic interpretations of the mythographical process as the

personification of human qualities, which Blake emulated in creating his own system, both gave way to a concept of myth which gave to the poet and the writer a greater insight into the nature of man. These revelations hinted at the survival of a dark side of the mind which might have retained its primitive need for ritual.

The theories of the anthropologists were particularly akin to the thought of W.B. Yeats, in association with his experiments with the occult. His interest in ritual and mysticism appears in "Vacillation", where he links the Attis vegetation ceremonies with the symbolism of magic, in the priest's hanging of the god's figure on a tree which is not the traditional pine, but an image from the Welsh Mabinogion:

"half all glittering flame and half all green  
Abounding foliage moistened with the dew;"  
- Collected Poems (London, 1965), p.282.

Yeats summons up the past in an atmosphere of mystic dread. In "Her Vision in the Wood" he evokes the Adonis myth which has affinities with that of Attis and is the epitome of Frazer's "slain god" thesis. An Homeric epithet creates a sense of antiquity and mystery as an aging woman stands.

"At wine-dark midnight in the sacred wood"  
and in her own blood sees the ritual procession of lament  
for the dying fertility god:

"and torches shone,  
And deafening music shook the leaves; a troop  
Shouldered a litter with a wounded man,  
Or smote upon the string and to the sound  
Sang of the beast that gave the fatal wound."  
- C.P. 312.

An illuminating contrast is that of Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis", a comic retelling in poetic form of Venus' amorous pursuit of the reluctant youth, and his untimely end. It reflects, in fact, the aetiological approach to mythology which the anthropologists sought to demolish. As Shakespeare tells it, the episode demonstrates the reason why

"Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend",  
because Venus has decreed

"Sith in his prime death doth my love destroy,  
They that love best their loves shall not enjoy."  
- "Venus and Adonis", lines 1136, 1163-4.

A certain purple and white flower, the anemone, according to Frazer, has its explanation in its commemoration of

"his pale cheeks, and the blood  
Which in round drops upon their whiteness stood."  
- Ibid., 1169-70.

In a post-Frazerian world, Yeats draws upon mythology to express a more subtle evaluation of human sexuality. The vision has its origins in the psychological state of the old woman:

"Too old for a man's love I stood in rage  
Imagining men."

She is not merely the conventional medium of the poet for introducing the scene, but is an integral part of the meaning of the poem. Yeats' awareness of the basis of the Adonis myth in the phallic worship of the Eastern fertility



religions gives a depth to the vision which only anthropology could have provided.

Ezra Pound's acquaintance with current archeological discoveries has already been mentioned; that he is thoroughly familiar also with the anthropological writings of his time is amply demonstrated by the Cantos. Frazer's priest at Nemi is referred to specifically more than once and the symbolic rituals of the creation of an animal spirit of the grain and the copulation of priestess and consort in the ploughed field to ensure the successful sowing and harvesting of the crops are summed up in Canto LXXX:

"and if the corn cat be beaten  
Demeter has lain in my furrow."  
- The Cantos of Ezra Pound (London, 1968)  
p. 548.

Demeter's daughter Persephone, associated with local fertility rites and with the Eleusinian mysteries in the company of Dionysus, is a constantly recurring and varying figure in Pound's writing. While Yeats chooses the Adonis myth, Pound prefers that of Persephone, which Frazer describes as another form of the same basic story: the loss of a loved one who personifies the vegetation which dies in winter and is reborn in spring. Guy Davenport places the Eleusinian theme of chthonic nature as a mystery, represented by Persephone, the daughter of Demeter and symbol of spring-time, at the heart of Pound's work.

Throughout the Cantos, Pound celebrates the Dionysian age, "phallic and ambrosial", which Greek mythology enshrined. There are constant echoes of the cries of the mourners of Adonis and the initiates of the mysteries, in a combination of sexual imagery and vegetation rites:

"The light has entered the cave. Io! Io!  
 The light has gone down into the cave,  
 Splendour on splendour!  
 . . .  
 By this door have I entered the hill.  
 Falleth,  
 Adonis falleth.  
 Fruit cometh after. The small lights drift out with  
 the tide,  
 Sea's claw has gathered them outward,  
 Four banners to every flower  
 The sea's claw draws the lamps outward."  
 XLVII, p.248-9.

These and a multiplicity of related and repeated examples are derived from the scholarship of those investigating the Mediterranean cultures. Pound does not limit his exploration to this sphere, but shows particular interest in the research of the German Frobenius, whose examination of African and Australian aboriginal mythologies allows Pound to give greater dimension to his anthropological references.

Reading outside the bounds of Greek and similar mythological studies gave T.S. Eliot the basis for "The Waste Land" from Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance, which deals with legends of British provenance. Eliot also makes specific acknowledgment of his debt to The Golden Bough for the symbol of the Hanged Man with its Attis connotations,

and the corpse buried in the garden, which has affinities with Pound's corn cat and the traditional figures which represent the ritual sacrifice, burial and rebirth of the spirit of the crops. It therefore contains the essential fertility which is to be restored to the waste land. In its Christianized form, the same ritual theme of death and resurrection recurred in "East Coker" of the Four Quartets.

The presence of so large a body of anthropological material in the writing of the moderns is due, to a considerable extent, of course, to the intrinsic fascination which it held for the educated man. The development of another new science accompanied the rise of anthropology, however, and combined with it to give the twentieth century a completely fresh conception of the relation of mythology to the human mind. Freud and Frazer were almost contemporary, and as S. Musgrove says in his study of the influences of anthropology in modern writing:

"The two new sciences, coinciding in time as well as in relevance, produced a mixture which was far more explosive than either could have been by itself." <sup>5</sup>

Freud's Totem and Taboo (1913), published in translation three years after the completion of The Golden Bough, uses the material of Frazerian anthropology in association with psychological interpretations in order to examine human

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5 S. Musgrove, Anthropological Themes in the Modern Novel, (Auckland, 1949), p.4.

behaviour patterns as they are revealed in the customs of primitive peoples. In particular, Freud studies the incest taboo, which he relates to the Oedipus myth. This tendency to treat the classical myths as being representations of the conflict within the psyche of man, whether valid or not, had a vast influence on the literary approach to mythology. An ancient tale could now be regarded as the expression of a relationship whose universal validity could endow any modern treatment of the theme with transcendent significance.

Even more influential in the reinterpretations of myth for the literary mind was C.G. Jung, who developed the theory of a racial memory which preserved the material of myths in the form of archetypes. The relevance of this to the writer lay in its potential as a storehouse of images to which each individual involuntarily reacts, according to the skilled handling of the material. Jung's definition of the "collective unconscious" demonstrates the significance of his theory for the understanding of mythology:

"This unconscious, buried in the structure of the brain and disclosing its living presence only through the medium of creative fantasy is the suprapersonal unconscious. It comes alive in the creative man, it reveals itself in the vision of the artist, in the inspiration of the thinker, in the inner experience of the mystic. The suprapersonal unconscious, being distributed throughout the brain-structure, is like an all-pervading, omnipresent, omniscient spirit. It knows man as he always was, and not as he is at this moment; it knows him as myth. For this reason, also, the connection with the suprapersonal or collective unconscious means an extension of man beyond himself;

it means death for his personal being and a rebirth in a new dimension, as was literally enacted in certain of the ancient mysteries."

- C.G. Jung, "The Role of the Unconscious"(1918)

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With the references to the Eleusinian mysteries in this extract, Jung seems prepared to acknowledge a collaboration between the anthropologists and the psychologists in searching mythology for answers to its origins. In a later study of the relation of archetypes and the collective unconscious it is interesting to note that he insists upon a clear separation of the two disciplines:

"Mythologists have always helped themselves out with solar, lunar, meteorological, vegetal, and other ideas of the kind. The fact that myths are first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul is something they have absolutely refused to see until now."

- C.G. Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious." (1934).

Clearly, Jung wants to see the anthropological and the psychological interpreters of myth going their separate ways. In making artistic use of contemporary ideas, however, the poets are unlikely to be doctrinaire. As Frederick Hoffman emphasises in Freudianism and the Literary Mind, (Michigan, 1967), the writer generally accepts as much or as little of a theory as suits his purpose or his inclination, and modifies the original thought accordingly.

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- 6 Essay in Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, M.D., M.R.C.P., Gerhardt Adler, Ph.D., (editors), The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London, 1964), Vol.10: Civilization in Transition, p.10.
- 7 The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol.9, Part I., p.5-6.

The poems of W.B. Yeats illustrate a parallel to Jungian psychology in the attitudes to mythology. Yeats is particularly attracted to the concept of the collective unconscious in combination with the tenets of occultist teachings, and he frequently associates these with the anthropological derivation of myth from ritual. "The Second Coming" achieves a synthesis of the theosophist theory of a cyclic pattern in history, (which Yeats had also encountered elsewhere), with the "Great Memory" in which lie images of the ritual death and rebirth of a new and terrible god, whose bestial form recalls Yeats' preoccupation with the mythology of the union of human woman and god in animal or bird form. Jung's leaning towards the mystic elements of psychology indicates the harmony of his mind with Yeats', which predisposed the poet towards receptivity to the doctrines of the psychologist.

The peculiar susceptibility of the twentieth-century mind to the myths and to the changes in our understanding of them is a characteristic which has made the Homeric epics especially close to the consciousness of writer and reader. George Steiner<sup>8</sup>, examining the revelations of psychological research into mythology, describes the poet as "the historian of the unconscious" and myth as being recognized today as "among the subtlest and most direct language of experience". He emphasized the haunting

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<sup>8</sup> George Steiner and Robert Fagles (editors), Homer: A Collection of Critical Essays, (New Jersey, 1962), p.3.

universality which has kept the myths alive throughout history, but which has only in the present century been claimed to have its origins in the human mind. Specific circumstances have made the modern age one in which the power of mythology has been dangerously apparent:

"Men who have placed the figure of Vedipus at the heart of their psychology, or who have fought for political survival against the myth of the superman and the Thousand-year Reich, know that fables are deadly serious. More than our predecessors, therefore, we approach Homer on his own terms."

- Steiner, op. cit., p.3.

The modern period did see the acceptance of Homeric myth as an ideal medium for the writer's expression, but this resurgent force of mythology had to overcome the shock of the First World War and the counter-forces which warfare dispatched against it. The post-war world was quite a different one from that before 1914. Similarly, the Homer of the new era could not be the same as the Edwardians had known. The two worlds seem as far apart as those postulated as the backgrounds to the Iliad, and the Odyssey: the former deriving its spirit from an age of stable society and heroic pursuit of glory in battle, seen from the apex of the hierarchy of power, the latter reflecting the consequences of blind preoccupation with war and conquest: the destruction of civilization and the dispersal of refugees. George Steiner describes the Odyssey as "the epic of the displaced

person",<sup>9</sup> originating in the realities of the Dorian invasions of 1100-900 B.C., which uprooted the Helladic peoples and scattered them through Asia Minor and the Mediterranean islands. The Edwardians chose the Iliad as the ultimate expression of the character of their times; the modern period identified itself with the Odyssey.

The Iliad buoyed up the spirits of the young men going to war, and even supported some of them throughout, but for many the heroic ethic was irrevocably dead. R.M. Ogilvie<sup>10</sup> quoted John Buchan's recognition of the Iliad's inappropriateness:

"To speak of glory seemed a horrid impiety.  
That was perhaps why I could not open Homer."

The circumstances of battle permitted expression only of the immediate realities or demanded publicity for the horrors which romantic mythologising might have disguised. The inability of most of the soldier poets to universalize their experience meant that their poems largely lacked relevance beyond their own time. It is significant that Siegfried Sassoon and Isaac Rosenberg, whose works are considered of more enduring worth, gave depth to their poetry by drawing readily on the characters and situations of Biblical mythology. By the end of the war the future seemed, however, to point towards a barren, de-mythologized literature.

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<sup>9</sup> Steiner, op.cit., p.4.

<sup>10</sup> Ogilvie, op. cit., p.75.



Conflicting predictions of the nature of writing in the modern period were made in relation to the classics.

Stanley Coffman<sup>11</sup> quotes T.E. Hulme's pre-war views:

"I want to maintain that after a hundred years of romanticism, we are in for a classical revival. I prophesy that a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming."

Unconvinced, at least of the survival of the mythological figures into the post-war era, were two writers mentioned by Douglas Bush<sup>12</sup>:

"Only a starveling singer seeks the stuff of songs among the Greeks, and Persephone must give way to Reality."

- Anna Wickham, The Contemplative Quarry, (1915), p.7.

"Who is to be bothered now with all these classical allusions? We have new Gods."

- Harold Munroe, Some Contemporary Poets, (1920), p.171.

Immediate reactions to the devastation of total warfare seemed to confirm the emergence of the mythless world which these latter writers anticipated. The "waste land" atmosphere which Eliot, Yeats, Pound and Joyce conveyed in the early twenties is retrospectively examined by Jung in an essay of 1928:

"[Modern man] has seen how beneficent are science, technology, and organization, but also how catastrophic they can be. He has likewise seen how all well-meaning governments have so thoroughly paved the way for peace on the principle "in time of peace prepare for war" that Europe has nearly gone to rack and ruin. And as for ideals, neither the Christian Church, nor the brotherhood of man, nor the solidarity of economic interests has stood

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11 Stanley K. Coffman, Jr., Imagism: A Chapter For The History of Modern Poetry, (Norman, Oklahoma, 1951), p.62.

12 Douglas Bush, op.cit., p.464.

up to the acid test of reality. Today, ten years after the war, we observe once more the same optimism, the same organizations, the same political aspirations, the same phrases and catchwords at work. How can we but fear that they will inevitably lead to further catastrophes? Agreements to outlaw war leave us sceptical, even while we wish them every possible success. At bottom, behind every such palliative measure there is a gnawing doubt. I believe I am not exaggerating when I say that modern man has suffered an almost fatal shock, psychologically speaking, and as a result has fallen into profound uncertainty."

- C.G. Jung, "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man",<sup>13</sup>  
(1928, revised 1931).

"The Waste Land" of 1922 anticipates Jung with a literary expression of the post-war sense of sterility, amorality and insecurity. Ironical juxtaposition of scraps of the fragmented past with the indifferent present shows the collapse of a civilization which can no longer benefit from the wisdom of the past. This theme of decay and dispersal after conflict appears closely related to the circumstances subsequent to the destruction of Troy; Eliot evokes the recurrent horror of conquest and bereavement which has its archetype in the falling towers of Troy:

"What is that sound high in the air  
Murmur of maternal lamentation  
Who are those hooded hordes swarming  
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth  
Ringed by the flat horizon only  
What is the city over the mountains  
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air  
Falling towers  
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria  
Vienna London  
Unreal"

- "The Waste Land", V, 366-376.

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13 Essay in The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol.10,p.77.

Troy has been laid waste; Odysseus too has met his fate: as the drowned Phoenician sailor he has been taken by the gentle death from the sea which Tiresias prophesied in the Nekuia and Madame Sosostris reiterates: "Fear death by water." Odysseus is linked to the whole theory of From Ritual to Romance of the dissemination of secret mysteries throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, even to Britain, which was achieved by voyagers like the Phoenicians on their periploi, from which Berard derives the origins of the Odyssey, or like the modern-day Mr. Eugenides, who has come to London bringing hints of secret perversion, a representative of ultimate infertility in sexual relationships. Eliot perhaps recognizes also the importance of the Odyssey as the first extant quest-romance and introduces its hero to the milieu of the later Grail quest with which Miss Weston deals. Odysseus' quest brings him sexual and intellectual experience and the re-establishment of an ordered, productive society; the protagonist of "The Waste Land" finds only emptiness and drought.

The vestiges of the Odysseus figure which remained in "The Waste Land" are indebted to the combined scholarship of Miss Weston, Victor Bérard and Sir James Frazer. The Odysseus of both Pound and Joyce is a more fully rounded character with much greater affinities with Homer's hero.

Most significant for the relation of the Odyssey to the modern period is the emphasis placed on the isolation of modern man and his need to struggle on as an individual.

The democratic society of the moderns was inimical to the Iliad. The soldier poets of the Great War reversed the direction of the reader's sympathies from the Iliad's aristocratic focus to the celebration of the passive sufferings of the anonymous private whose fate was often sealed by the incompetence of his commanders:

"He's a cheery old card", grunted Harry to Jack  
 As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack,  
 But he did for them both by his plan of attack."  
 - Siegfried Sassoon, "The General", Collected Poems  
1908-1956, (London, 1964), p.75.

The sales of E.V. Rieu's paper-back translations of Homer reflected the changed evaluation of the two poems. The Iliad had previously won greater popularity, from the time of the earliest papyrus records, in which copies of the Iliad far outnumbered those of the Odyssey. The Rieu translations sold with the opposite emphasis, the interest perhaps being derived from Joyce's use of the Odyssey, or perhaps simply prompted by the same attraction to the epic which had dictated Joyce's own choice.

A prevalent mood of the moderns was that of

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; 14  
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."

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14 W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming", C.P. 211.

There was a desperate need for a framework within which to express oneself, and for a means of establishing some continuity between the past and the present. Anthropology and psychology provided the poet with revitalized symbols and an awareness of the permanent link between civilized and primitive man, because of the unifying power of mythology. Eliot understood these qualities of mythology and commended Ulysses because it demonstrated his ideas in action, using the Homeric material:

"In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him."

-"Ulysses, Order and Myth", Dial (Nov., 1923).

In company with the desire for a dependable framework went the search for a mythology. The rise of nationalism suggested the possibility of exploiting the virtually untapped Celtic mythologies, particularly that of Ireland, to which Yeats gave his attention. His valiant attempts to popularize his native pantheon could not, however, ultimately disguise the facts that the classical myths have deeper roots in the western mind than have any regional material and that they have developed such variations and accretions that they offer interpretation on multiple levels, whereas the local figures have comparatively circumscribed connotations.

The modern period, then, may be seen to have accepted mythology as a valuable component of its literature. Greek

myths provide themes which can be treated without demanding explanatory elaboration, but as archetypal expressions can stand in unadorned simplicity. Their original medium has been poetic; this conditions their appropriateness to imaginative and poetic presentation. Their association with psychological states of mind endorses the poet's innate awareness of a subconscious response, which the rational nineteenth century had left unexplained.

The Homeric epics have their own appeal; the mysteries of Circe's spells held a more potent allure for the modern temperament than did the masculine heroics of the warring aristocrats. This view is supported by Jung, who wrote:

"Ever since Nietzsche there has been constant emphasis on the 'Dionysian' aspect of life in contrast to its 'Apollonian' opposite. Since the Birth of Tragedy (1872) the dark, earthy, feminine side, with its mantic and orgiastic characteristics, has possessed the imagination of philosophers and poets."

- "The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man" 15  
(1933, revised and expanded, 1934).

It was in relation to the nature of womankind that the Iliad retained a degree of popularity with the moderns. It enshrines the archetype of destructive beauty in Helen of Troy, which makes her a compulsive symbol for Yeats and a fitting Tellus-Helena figure for Pound, uniting woman and the fertile earth in one image.

Certain qualities of Homer himself were attractive to the modern writers. His paganism was a powerful draw

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15 Essay in The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol. 10,  
p. 181 note.

in an age when Christianity had largely lost its vitality, but lingered on in conventionalised observance. The characteristics of Homeric poetry suited the cleaning up of language and style which the moderns demanded: it had strong outlines with directness of thought and vividness of description, in combination with technical versatility, to which Pound especially paid homage:

"I have never read half a page of Homer without finding melodic invention, I mean melodic invention that I didn't already know."

- ABC of Reading (New York) p.43.

The first generation moderns felt able to make serious use of Homer. The individual adapted him to the dictates of his own personality and world view. Yeats, Pound and Joyce use Homer's myths and characters extensively and with profound significance in relation to their total works. Eliot's inclination is more towards the employment of the literature of the past as a contrast to contemporary degradation, as "Sweeney Erect" demonstrates. The tragedy of a woman's exploitation and abandonment which is epitomised in the classical myth of Theseus and Ariadne has its modern counterpart in the indifference of Sweeney for an epileptic prostitute. A Mediterranean setting evokes the islands of antiquity, birthplaces of gods, and perils of the voyager. Two of Odysseus' island encounters supply correlatives of the squalid horror of Sweeney's world: Neusicaa and Polyphemus together participate in

the animalism of Sweeney's self-gratification.

W.H. Auden, as a second generation modern poet, finds only bitter irony in the relationship of Homer and contemporary society. Myth is dead in the soulless world of the thirties:

"But here no nymph comes naked to the youngest shepherd,  
the fountain is deserted, the laurel will not grow;  
the labyrinth is safe but endless, and broken  
is Ariadne's thread".

- "Casino", Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957  
(London, 1969), p.97.

In Auden's times myth was something which existed only in the minds of those who were distanced from reality: Victor, the naive and betrayed husband, is permitted ironically to call his bride a Helen of Troy, not realizing that the comparison implies faithlessness as well as beauty.

The ideals of the Homeric epic are not those of Auden. He rejects the strong hero-type, central to the Iliad, in favour of the effeminate, but to Auden, the braver man!

"Pretty to watch with bat or ball,  
An Achilles, too, in a bar-room brawl,  
But in the ditch of hopeless odds,  
The hour of desertion by brass and gods.

Not a hero. It is the pink-and-white,  
Fastidious, almost girlish, in the night  
When the proud-arsed broad-shouldered break and run,  
Who covers their retreat, dies at his gun."

- Collected Shorter Poems, p.269.

The Homeric warrior is denied a place in the twentieth century; other surviving elements of epic are similarly ridiculed and the figures from Homer are placed in contexts



which can only make them appear sordid or self-seeking:

"The wallflower can become the rose,  
Penelope the homely seem  
The Helen of Odysseus' dream  
If she will look as if she were  
A fascinated listener,  
Since men will pay large sums to whores  
For telling them they are not bores."

- "New Year Letter", Part two, Collected Longer Poems  
(London, 1968), p.93.

It is made clear that cheap reading matter and popular sport have replaced among modern youth the ambitions for glory of a Trojan war. Even sailors, part of the tradition of the "hollow ships" feel no echo of their heroic past:

"The sailors come ashore  
Out of their hollow ships,  
Mild-looking middle class boys  
Who read the comic strips;  
One baseball game is more  
To them than fifty Troys."

- "Fleet Visit", Collected Shorter Poems, p.247.

The summary of all these sentiments comes in "The Shield of Achilles", written after the second world war and the close of the modern period, which casts an illuminating light on the way in which Homeric myth had come to be a touchstone for an evaluation of the twentieth century world. On the original shield Hephaestos had depicted the ordered life of the Greek cities, the battles and sieges, the fruitfulness of the earth, and finally the graceful dancing of the Greek youth. The poem contrasts this stable, natural society with the artificial wilderness of the modern waste land and the aimlessness of its young people. Opposed to the willing sacrifice of garlanded cattle stands the crucifixion, with

its air of inconsequence. The Dionysian and Christian attitudes to life and the gods are placed in antithesis, and the imminent death of Achilles symbolizes the end of the heroic era which the Homeric shield had celebrated.

Auden, born in 1907, was brought up in a world in which only fragments remained to be shored against the ruins of civilization. Even before the outbreak of the catastrophic Great War, circumstances had given Yeats, Pound and Joyce contacts with Homer from which they retained permanent impressions. Homeric mythology was established as an important element in the composition of their work.

### III

"Homer is my example and his unchristened heart."

- W.B. Yeats, "Vacillation", C.P.286.

W.B. Yeats was a mild, middle-class Anglo-Irish lyric poet and playwright, trying to write for an audience which as a whole had, he knew,

"no binding interest, no great passion or bias <sup>1</sup>  
that the dramatist can awake".

His theories allowed him to identify himself with his opposite, Homer, whose Iliad glorified active, aristocratic heroes in epic terms and with the assurance of a unified society, which appreciated the artistic achievements of its members. For Yeats, Homer fulfilled the demands of

"that doctrine of 'the mask' which has convinced me that every passionate man . . . is, as it were, linked with another age, historical or imaginary, where alone he finds images that rouse his energy".<sup>2</sup>

The Homeric period was particularly fertile in images to supply Yeats with the "metaphors for poetry" which he needed. The reading of Homer provided, in fact, a link to both kinds of past age: the "imaginary" world of the epics themselves, whose larger-than-life figures were surrounded by myth and magic, and the "historical" period in which Yeats envisaged Homer composing and relating his poetry. Homer was an exciting example to a twentieth century writer, as a man of his times, as a poet, and as an intermediary between

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Allan Wade, The Letters of W.B. Yeats (London, 1954), p.406.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London, 1955), p.152.

the present and the mythology of ancient Greece. The resolution of his vacillation arose from Yeats' veneration for the man and his works, and his idealization of the pagan civilization with which he dealt.

Yeats saw the man, Homer, standing at the beginning of the tradition to which he himself desired to belong. From his early childhood, his personal inclination and his father's influence produced in him a fascination with the heroic periods of history and legend. In his Autobiographies he relates his father's programme of developing an appreciation of poetry in his eight-or nine-year-old son by reading to him The Lays of Ancient Rome, Ivanhoe and The Lay of the Last Minstrel. The boy's taste for romantic folk-lore was established early: he searched Hans Andersen and Grimm for "the knights and dragons and beautiful ladies" for which he longed, and soon found the ideal combination of heroism, beauty and the supernatural in Homer's poems. An episode from his childhood illustrates J.B. Yeats' principles of guidance, and his son's youthful recognition of the attraction of the Trojan story. The passage casts an incidental light on the presence of Homer even in the children's magazines of the 1870's:

"When I first went to School, he tried to keep me from reading boys' papers, because a paper, by its very nature, as he explained to me, had to be made for the average boy or man, and so could not but thwart one's growth. He took away my paper and I had not the courage to say that I was but reading and delighting in a prose retelling of the Iliad."

- Autobiographies, p.46.

This reading of the classics in translation foreshadowed a lifetime of frustration at being unable to make worth-while first-hand use of them. In an essay of 1914, "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places", Yeats regretted the limitations imposed by his ignorance, "My Greek gone and my meagre Latin all but gone." In his Autobiographies he expresses the fervent wish that his father had taken him away from school and made him "a properly educated man" by teaching him Latin and Greek, and thus saved him from having to look "in useless longing at books that have been, through the poor mechanism of translation, the builders of my soul" - Autobiographies, p.58.

Yeats' 1930 diary preserved his prescription for the education of his son, which was clearly designed to prevent Michael from becoming "a smatterer like his father". Trying to set the clock back, he proposed the curriculum of a gentleman, with the emphasis on Greek. Latin was prohibited, since "the Roman people were the classic decadence, their literature form without matter." French and German the nine-year-old already knew; he was to be left to pick up Geography and History for himself and to get his science from the newspapers, it being in any case no job for a gentleman. The first use to which Michael's knowledge of Greek was to be put, was the reading of "that most exciting of all stories, the Odyssey, from

that landing in Ithaca to the end'. This passage was particularly esteemed by Yeats for its poetic quality.

The rejection of Roman culture, in favour of Greek, was, in part, a reflection of the enduring force of the Hellenic revival, but, regardless of outside factors, Yeats was naturally inclined towards the spontaneity and inspiration of Greek writing. He summed up his preference in an essay "Plain Man's Oedipus" in the New York Times of January 15, 1933, which Allan Wade quotes in his edition of Yeats' letters:

"Greek literature, like old Irish literature, was founded upon belief, not like Latin literature, upon documents."

- Letters, p.537.

Anthropology had shown the closeness of Greek myth and religion to the basic primitive life of man; for Yeats, the Romans were too cerebral, too imitative, and too far divorced from their origins.

It was to the Greek tradition, then, that Yeats chose to turn. He defined, with increasing assertiveness, his devotion to tradition itself, as he came to feel himself in conflict with the modern ideas of the younger poets. The continuity of past and present was all-important: in the face of those who hoped to create a synthetic folk art from contemporary jazz and music hall, he rejected all that did not have a tradition going back to Olympus.

In April 1936,<sup>3</sup> he wrote to Dorothy Wellesley in condemnation of the "difficult" poets, who were "goldsmiths working with a glass screwed into one eye", whereas he followed "the road of naturalness and swiftness", with the support of thirty centuries. He saw himself among the men of action whose "looking to right and left" as they marched ahead symbolised for Yeats his own studies of past literature and his use of legend. A reverence for tradition was his protection against the modern tendency, as he saw it, to turn in upon oneself, not out into the world and its literary heritage.

Like T.S. Eliot, Yeats saw great literature as the product of tradition and the individual talent. He had great admiration for a quality which he found in the poetry of some young Irish poets, their attempt "to speak out of a people to a people; behind them stretched the generations".<sup>4</sup> He saw himself as one of a group which derived its inspiration from the tradition which was close to folk-lore:

"We were the last romantics - chose for theme  
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;  
Whatever's written in what poets name  
The book of the people."  
- C.P. 276.

Yeats praised these young poets for not trying to be "separated individual men". They were like the almost anonymous minstrel poet who had been an ideal figure to him throughout his life, because his craft linked the Greek and Irish traditions together. The desire to "get back to Homer" embodied the

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<sup>3</sup> Letters, p. 852.

<sup>4</sup> W.B. Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work" (1937), Essays and Introductions (London, 1961), p. 510.

appeal of primitive yet heroic simplicity.

He took the foremost mythological poet as his example; his goal was to make himself an Irish Homer. Similarities between the Irish and Greek tradition came to his notice from the time of his youth. Intellectual knowledge of the heroes and legends of ancient Greece ran parallel to emotional immersion in the native folk-lore of Ireland. His childhood memories included that of his mother and a fisherman's wife exchanging "stories that Homer might have told" and the figures of Irish legend and folk story could readily be identified with the protagonists of Homeric epic. His Celtic Twilight of 1893 was a collection, in the Homeric tradition, of local stories, many of whose characters bore a strong resemblance either to Homer's subjects or to Homer himself. "Dust hath closed Helen's Eye" makes the specific comparison between Homer's fatal heroine and the Irish peasant beauty, Mary Hynes, whom a blind man so celebrated in his song that his hearers were "maddened by those rhymes", as Yeats recalls in "The Tower",

"And one was drowned in the great bog of Cloone."

"The Last Gleeman" justified Yeats in his transplantation of Homer to the Irish scene. The tale records an Irish predecessor of Yeats' who had identified himself with Homer. He was the travelling poet, Michael Moran (1794-1846), who had played upon a sympathetic public's familiarity with the



Homeric legend in an awkward predicament:

"Once an officious peeler arrested him as a vagabond, but was triumphantly routed amid the laughter of the court, when Moran reminded his worship of the precedent set by Homer, who was also, he declared, a poet, and a blind man, and a beggar man."

- Mythologies (London, 1959), p.50.

The blindness of Homer had symbolic significance to Yeats. As the poet of the lonely tower in an age antithetical to his own personality he felt that the isolation which Homer's handicap gave him provided as compensation an intensity of inner vision which made his poetry powerful. Yeats examines "Why the Blind Man in Ancient Times was Made a Poet" in a 1906 essay, and concludes that the blind poet "had to be driven out of activities all his nature cried for, before he could be contented with the praise of life." In his Autobiographies, musing on the death of Synge he asks:

"Can a man of genius make that complete renunciation of the world necessary to the full expression of himself without some vice or some deficiency? You were happy or at least blessed, 'blind old man of Scio's rocky isle'."

Without the explicit Homeric overtones, but probably originating in the same concept of the increased acuteness of the unimpaired senses, the Blind Man reappears in Yeats' Cuchulain plays, compensating for his blindness with malevolent cunning.

"A very old man looking like something out of mythology" introduces The Death of Cuchulain and promises to teach the

the musicians "the music of the beggar-man, Homer's music" - C. Plays, p.694. The relation of Homer to music is a significant aspect of Yeats' view of epic poetry. From his boyhood he had longed to hear poems spoken to a harp, as he imagined Homer to have spoken his. He envisaged Homer in terms of the Irish travelling minstrels and had particular respect for the spontaneity of the poems and their roots in the ordinary lives of the people. The poet, being "a singer born", could not help but choose, like Homer, the theme of original sin, the mire and complexity of human existence. Yeats' sense of the poet's intuitive knowledge of human nature wrought to intensity and his regard for the tradition of poetic composition lie behind his idealization of the itinerant singer of epic tales:

"I wanted the strongest passions, passions that had nothing to do with observation, and metrical forms that seemed old enough to have been sung by men half asleep or riding upon a journey."

- Autobiographies, p.125.

Yeats found great pleasure in his belief that Homer was sung, and that other favourite authors were close enough to their audiences for their poetry to be sung aloud by the common people. His own poetry was in many cases consciously close to song. The title of Words for Music Perhaps suggests that his poems might be seen as lyrics for unwritten tunes. Songs from the plays appear in the collections of poems, as if their roles are interchangeable and the

ballad-refrain becomes increasingly as an ingredient of his poetry. The concept of Homer as the master ballad-writer depended largely upon Yeats' desire to avoid artificiality in treating the basic human qualities. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley he decrees that

"the writer of ballads must resemble Homer not Vergil. His metaphors must be such things as come to mind in the midst of speech."  
- Letters, p.854.

For Yeats, wearing the minstrel's mask, Homer's example was that of natural and instinctive creativity. He was the anonymous singer whom Yeats sought to emulate in his Crazy Jane and Old Tom sequences or in the quality of simplicity and antiquity of "The Three Bushes". This was an aspect of the epic poet which Yeats took as a model: the poet as celebrator of the ordinary man, in poetry from which the personality of the writer was virtually absent. In this context Homer personified the union of Tradition and Folk Art. Exasperated by the criticisms of the young James Joyce, who had said that his own poetry "owed nothing to anything but his own mind which was much nearer to God than folklore", Yeats defended his personal debt to the past by

"explaining the dependence of all good art on popular tradition. . . . When the idea which comes from individual life marries the image that is born from the people, one gets great art, the art of Homer, and of Shakespeare, and of Chartres Cathedral."

- quoted R. Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats,  
(London, 1964), p.88.

Yeats was impressed by a description of himself in the Yale Review of 1933 as the writer of "public" language. Homer was a "public" poet, writing for the people about their heroic past. Yeats determined to fulfil this role in Ireland, and had the encouragement of early contact with the Irish nationalist movements whose expressed aim was the publicizing of Ireland as a separate, independent entity. Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League was founded in 1893 and stimulated the development of a distinctively national literature.

Contact with his father's friends, such as Todhunter who had written Helena of Troas, "an oratorical Swinburnian play which I thought as unactable as it was unreadable",<sup>5</sup> gave him at least an early awareness of the diversity of treatment given the Homeric theme in his own times. More stimulating were his meetings with Oscar Wilde, who had read Homer in the original for its literary interest "and not as a school-master reads him for the grammar". He listened to Yeats as he told long Irish stories and compared his art of storytelling to that of Homer.<sup>6</sup>

Yeats also paid tribute to Standish O'Grady as a predecessor who had

"Made all the old Irish heroes. . alive again. .  
condensing and arranging, as he thought Homer<sup>7</sup>  
would have arranged and condensed."

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5 Autobiographies, p.119.

6 Autobiographies, pp.135,138.

7 Ibid., p.221.

In 1934 on a lecture tour of the United States he cited William Morris as an important influence, since he had given him "all the greatest stories, Homer and the sagas included".<sup>8</sup> Robert Bridges too played his part in keeping thoughts of Homer active in Yeats' mind. In letters to Bridges in December, 1896 and March, 1897<sup>9</sup> he expresses his delight in Achilles in Scyros and The Return of Ulysses, and in a review of the latter, printed in Essays and Introductions, he declares that throughout the play he had recaptured the atmosphere of the Odyssey:

"As I read, the gathering passion overwhelms me, as it did when Homer himself was the singer."

Most important of all was Yeats' association with Lady Gregory in the collection of local material and in the inauguration and administration of the Abbey Theatre, in which Yeats was able to produce the plays which owed so much to the Irish legends. In Ireland he sought

"a tradition that was a part of actual history, that had associations in the scenery of my own country",

hoping to bring his speech closer to that of daily life.

With the help of Lady Gregory he made a study of peasant beliefs, desiring to re-establish unity in Irish life:

"Could I not found an Eleusinian Rite, which would bind into a common symbolism, a common meditation, a school of poets and men of letters, so that poetry and drama would find the religious weight they have lacked since the middle ages, perhaps since ancient Greece?"

- from an unpublished draft of Per Armica Silentia Lunae, quoted Ellman, op.cit., p.305.

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<sup>8</sup> Essays and Introductions, p.447.

<sup>9</sup> Letters, pp.268,281.

Yeats turned deliberately to this Irish material and as early as 1887 was convinced that a school of Irish poetry would arise, based on Irish myth and history. In a letter of 1898 <sup>10</sup> he extends this value of Irish subject matter from the Celtic poets to the western world as a whole and declares that the Irish possess the most plentiful treasure of legends in Europe. By 1901 in an essay on "Ireland and the Arts" he was ready to maintain that Irish legends surpassed all but those of Greece in wild beauty and imaginative events. Clearly, Irish literature held the potential for a new Homeric era whose influence would be world-wide, and whose chief poet would be W.B. Yeats, a latter-day Homer and head of a new Irish tradition. Unfortunately for these dreams, Ireland's mythology did not live up to early hopes. Its content was not sufficient to permit extensive experimentation and interpretation, and the leading characters had fewer memorable qualities than the Greeks.

Belief in the shifting borders of the individual memory and in the Great Memory or Jung's collective unconscious, related to the theosophical concept of a universal religion, meant that figures from one body of myth could be used in conjunction with those from a different civilization, because of the assumption that their origins were essentially the same. Working from this premise, one could find the Adonis or the Diarmuid myth equally valid, but for poetic use the former

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<sup>10</sup> Letters, p.308.

would be more satisfactory, since the elements of the death and worship of the hero would be familiar to a wider audience. Yeats retained the Gaelic subject matter and reworked it in his plays, but its place in his poetry was short-lived. The role of Homeric poet was extended to embrace specific references from the epics, but continued also in Yeats' patriotic commemoration of Ireland's troubles and her dying tradition.

The social structure of Ireland perpetuated, up until the internal struggle which followed the Great War, the traditional feudal relationship of landed aristocracy and peasant dependants without a strong middle class, a hierarchy which approximated to the society of the Homeric epics. The great families maintained their heritage from its eighteenth century peak with pride, heroic idealism and fierce patriotism. In such circumstances Yeats felt that the atmosphere might have been congenial to the epic poet, but internal and external war robbed the houses of their younger generation, their wealth and even their existence. The Homeric parallels were plain: Robert Gregory, killed in the First World War, died the needless, heroic death of the Greek warriors, who rejoiced in the opportunity for glory and gave their lives for a cause which was not their own:

"Those that I fight I do not hate,  
Those that I guard I do not love."  
- C.P. 152.

The destruction of the great houses during the Troubles

was the equivalent of the fall of Troy; it signified the end of an era and the collapse of a great civilization. After it came the levelling modern spirit, which was inimical to the aristocratic supremacy of the Iliad. The Civil War brought anarchy and a waste land as real as the large-scale devastation of Europe. Yeats deeply mourned the passing of the Irish aristocracy, which he recognized to have been symbolic of all past glories. In a letter of May, 1932 he recalls "a queer Dublin sculptor" who had come to pay his respects on the death of Lady Gregory and who had described the portraits and mementos of those with whom the Gregorys had been associated as

"All the nobility of earth." (Letters, p.796).

Yeats sensed that this was meant not only for these particular people, but for the whole lost tradition - "How much of my own verse has not been but the repetition of those words." From the beginning of his first volume with the pastoral lament

"The woods of Arcady are dead,  
And over is their antique joy;  
Of old the world on dreaming fed;  
Grey Truth is now her painted toy;"

through descriptions of the eighteenth century legacy of the Anglo-Irish landowners to the summary of the nobility which had departed, in "Beautiful Lofty Things:"

"All the Olympians; a thing never known again",  
- C.P. 348.

Yeats looked with regret to the classical and national



tradition whose passing away denied him the self-fulfilment demanded by his epic-orientated personality.

T.S. Eliot's evaluation of James Joyce's use of the Homeric myth in Ulysses commends mythology as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history". Eliot recognised Yeats as having been the first of his contemporaries to realise the need for such a framework as a substitute for the recaptive community atmosphere which sustained the epic poet. Peter Ure <sup>11</sup> quotes Yeats in an essay of 1902 which emphasizes the appeal of myth to the writer:

"The great virtues, the great joys, the great privations come in the myths, and, as it were, take mankind between their naked arms and without putting off their divinity. Poets have taken their themes more often from stories that are all, or half, mythological, than from history or stories that give one the sense of history."

Homer gave Yeats an introduction to this world of classical mythology, not only in the case of his own protagonists, but in that of figures whose appearance in the plot was only incidental. The characteristics which Homer chose to highlight from amongst scores of stories surrounding the ancient gods and mortals were those which Yeats echoed. Demodocus' song of the secret amours of Aphrodite and her discovery by her lame husband Hephaestus, in the Odyssey, VIII has the same emphasis on woman's fickleness as Yeats'

<sup>11</sup> Peter Ure, Towards a Mythology: Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats, (London, 1946), p.7.

reference in "A Prayer for my Daughter". Homer seems, therefore, the probable source of the allusion.

In its ethos and its epic qualities the Iliad was of the greatest importance to Yeats. He had particular regard for the poetic value of the Odyssey, and seemed more attracted to the latter half of it, which he felt contained "perhaps the most perfect poetry of the world", but which, significantly, was closer, in its concern for revenge and conflict, to the atmosphere of the Iliad. Odysseus was a vivid character to Yeats; even Hamlet, Lear and Oedipus he found more cloudy in his mind, but the poem did not seem to stimulate his imagination as the Iliad did. Writing in 1898 of the future of poetry he used the plot of the Odyssey as his example of a long, narrative poem, perhaps because of the universality of its theme:

"I think that we will learn again how to  
describe at great length an old man  
wandering among enchanted islands,  
his return home at last, his slow-gathering  
vengeance, a flitting shape of a goddess,  
and a flight of arrows."

- "The Autumn of the Body", Essays and  
Introductions, p.193.

Ethel Thornbury's examination of the place of Tom Jones in the epic tradition <sup>12</sup> emphasizes the archetypal nature of the Odyssey story, which in summary "might be the plot of a tale of any time and any country". Yeats' prophecy

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<sup>12</sup> E.M. Thornbury, Henry Fielding's Theory of the Comic Prose Epic, (Wisconsin, 1931), p.149.

sounds like a premonition of Ulysses and The Cantos.

He had, then, great respect for the Odyssey because of its poetry and its hero, whose character stood as a powerful demonstration of Homer's creative genius. Yet the Iliad provided Yeats' real inspiration. It was closer than the Odyssey was to his nature and to his times, as well perhaps to his generation, since he was born two decades before Pound and Joyce and was more subject than they to the influence of the late Victorian enthusiasm for the Iliad.

His supreme admiration was for the man of action. The Iliad provided archetypal representatives of this kind of man, Greek Cuchulains like Achilles and Hector, whose aristocratic values and success in arms were unattainable ideals of the retiring poet. They had indeed "courage equal to desire", were men of feeling and action whose lasting symbolic power had proved the potential of poetry to "make things happen". Homer had demonstrated that poetry was not just "a way of happening" but had given inspiration and example over the centuries. Yeats was concerned to leave a legacy to posterity, and although not a man of action himself, he believed in the power of the pen:

"Did that play of mine send out  
Certain men the English shot?"

- C.P. 393.

The Iliad traced the actions preceding the fall of

Troy; Yeats recorded the loss of Ireland's heroes from Cuchulain and Oisín to Parnell, Robert Gregory and the leaders of the Easter Rebellion, and described the chaos and destruction which the struggle for independence produced. Most of all, he paralleled the Iliad in his celebration of its fatal heroine, Helen of Troy, whose modern reincarnation played her part in the tragedy of Yeats and of Ireland.

The boy Yeats had had a predilection for "knights and dragons and beautiful ladies";<sup>13</sup> if Achilles and Hector were his knights, Helen of Troy was the paragon of beauty. Like Sato's sword, wrapped in embroidered cloth, Homer's Iliad provided

"things that are  
Emblematical of love and war"  
- C.P., 265.

Helen of Troy was universally acclaimed as a love symbol, ever since Paris had been bribed with her as the supreme gift which Aphrodite had in her power. Yeats recognized the ease with which he could introduce her into what had been predominantly Irish poetry, because the peasants already possessed stories like that of Mary Hynes which exalted beauty's influence. He knew that

"these poor countrymen and countrywomen in their beliefs and in their emotions, are many years nearer to that old Greek world, that set beauty beside the fountain of things, than are our men of learning:"Dust hath closed Helen's Eye",  
Mythologies, p.28.

The Helen references therefore brought Greece and Ireland closer together, because her story was not an alien one

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<sup>13</sup> Autobiographies, p.46.

to Irish sympathies.

There was another dimension to Yeats' early imaginings:

"When I thought of women they were modelled on those in my favourite poets and loved in brief tragedy, or like the girl in 'The Revolt of Islam', accompanied their lovers through all manner of wild places, lawless women without homes and without children."

- Autobiographies, p.64.

Proud beauty and romantic irresponsibility typified Yeats' women. He found his personal destroyer of men and cities in Maud Gonne, whose image haunted his work from as early as his second volume of 1893:

"For those red lips, with all their mournful pride,  
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,  
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,  
And Usna's children died."

- C.P. 41.

Maud Gonne was as wild and lawless as any heroine of epic or saga, with her mind fixed on the attainment of Ireland's freedom, a woman who contravened Yeats' cherished dictates

"that all beautiful women may  
Live in uncomposite blessedness,  
And lead us to the like - if they  
Will banish every thought." - C.P. 198.

Not content even to play Helen's role of the passive cause of war, she sought conflict actively. Yeats recalls that she had vexed his father

"by praise of war, war for its own sake,  
not as the creator of certain virtues,  
but as if there were some virtue in  
excitement itself."

- Autobiographies, p.123.

She, like Helen, was symbolic of those who go their own ways, denying their potential for stable personal relationships and insisting blindly and selfishly on their own ideal of self-fulfilment:

"Homer's Paragon  
Who never gave the burning town a thought."  
- C.P. 194.

This then was Yeats' chief debt to Homer, the inspiration of the identification of Helen and Maud Gonne who had "all living hearts betrayed".<sup>14</sup> Yet although she had "taught to ignorant men most violent ways" she had her justification in that she was

"what Homer's age  
Bred to be a hero's wage,"<sup>15</sup>

though fate had placed her in an age which denied her another Troy to burn. Bitterness lingered from Maud Gonne's rejection of his own proposals and her reckless abandonment of her femininity in the involvement with Irish politics and Yeats concluded that old men had the right to be mad, who had known

"A Helen of social welfare dream,  
Climb on a wagenette to scream."  
- C.P. 388.

The imaginative use of the Helen / Maud Gonne parallel seems to show a disappointing falling-off in some of the verse, particularly in "A Man Young and Old", where the Homeric references tend to function merely as convenient shorthand. Helen appears in such pedestrian allusions

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<sup>14</sup> C.P. 220.

<sup>15</sup> C.P. 103.

as

"She who had brought great Hector down  
And put all Troy to wreck"  
- C.P. 251.

or

"Paris' love  
That had so straight a back."  
- C.P. 254.

These more perfunctory references rely heavily on the reader's recalling the earlier freshness of the lament for the girl who

"Seemed the greatness of the world in tears,  
Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships  
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers."  
- C.P. 46,

The Helen / Maud Gonne / Mary Hynes complex of images in Yeats' poetry and prose was a valuable stimulus to his work. An Irish Homer was incomplete without a figure comparable to the fatal "woman Homer sung". The parallel gave richness, intensity and unity to the best of Yeats' poems to Maud Gonne and in his private relationship to her helped him to distance himself sufficiently from the emotional entanglement to be able to resign himself to the inevitable.

A link between the Homeric mythology and the anthropological theories of the slain god is provided by T.R. Henn<sup>16</sup> in his study of the plays A Full Moon in March and The King of the Great Clock Tower, both of which depend on symbolism with obvious connotations of the ancient fertility rituals and the sacrifice of a young

<sup>16</sup> T.R. Henn, The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats. (London, 1966), p.286.

man to an all-demanding Earth goddess.

A song in A Full Moon in March links Yeats' view of woman's cruel exploitation of man as typified by the phallic religions, with the tragedy of Troy at Helen's hands:

"O what innkeeper's daughter  
Shared the Byzantine Crown?  
Girls that have governed cities,  
Or burned great cities down,  
Have bedded with their fancy-man  
Whether a king or clown."

- Collected Plays, 627.

This transformation of Maud Gonne into a remote priestess-figure is related to her representation in some of the poems as more than woman. In "First Love", part of "A Man Young and Old", she became the moon-goddess, virginal and indifferent, with a "heart of stone". In "Beautiful Lofty Things" she was exalted to the presence of "all the Olympians" as the proud Athene, virgin goddess of war, who had led the Greek siege of Troy as Maud Gonne had incited the Irish against their English oppressors. Yet Athene had also protected Odysseus throughout his wanderings and had engineered his triumphant return. Like Maud Gonne, she was a strange mixture of Warrior and unattainable patron goddess.

Homer's example to his Irish successor did not stop at the provision of parallels for modern figures. Yeats sought to emulate his master by creating his own modern pantheon from idealised compatriots. The tendency is clearest in "Beautiful Lofty Things" and is reworked in "The Municipal



Gallery Revisited", but the concept of a modern Irish equivalent of the ancient Homeric hero was one that had long been in Yeats' writing. The death of Lady Gregory's son inspired a memorial poem in which he is described as a universal man, a Sidney, epitome of the chivalric Renaissance man and the epic hero:

"Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
And all he did done perfectly."

- C.P. 151.

The mythologising was continued into the following poem, "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death", which showed Robert Gregory to have died the noble death of a warrior, for the sake only of dying well. The Irish hero thus earned his place among the company of the great men of action of the past:

"Achilles, Timor, Barbar, Barhaim, all  
Who have lived in joy and laughed into the face of Death."

- C.P. 179.

The courage of Mabel Beardsley relates back to Robert Gregory and forward to Lady Gregory herself, who was to Yeats the prime example of vanishing eighteenth-century Ireland, and the symbol of aristocratic and Homeric bravado, since she would rather risk her life than be intimidated by an assassin's threat. These representatives of the Irish tradition which meant so much to Yeats and had so strong an Homeric flavour clearly laid claim on the poet to be honoured as figures of legend commensurable with those of epic.

Not only does Yeats convert the living into legend,  
but he also creates his own characters, envisaging himself  
as an heir to Homer:

"the tragedy began  
With Homer that was a blind man  
And I myself created Hanrahan  
And drove him drunk or sober through the dawn."  
- C.P. 220.

His creations, Hanrahan, Robartes and Aedh were, he said,  
"principles of the mind" rather than real people and as  
such could fade from the poems once the mood which they  
evoked had been captured in verse. The more powerful  
characters were those from the peasant tradition, like  
Crazy Jane, whose assertive self-reliance and sharply-  
defined personality suit Yeats' theory of the supremacy of  
the individual in the Homeric age, while extending the  
range of his masks.

Homer the epic poet and Homer the mythographer had  
served Yeats as his examples. Homeric characters had been  
revitalised in his poetry and in their turn had given form  
to his personal poetry and universality to his vision of  
Ireland past and present. Another dimension of the Homeric  
influence exists in Yeats' system of history, A Vision,  
which is his own private epic composition, an extended  
work with a single central theme of the cyclic nature of  
man and his civilization. In A Vision Homer's presence  
is symbolic and his "unchristened heart" of dominant  
importance.

The Greek and Christian eras in Yeats' system comprised a civilization made up of two millenia, in each of which a complete revolution of the Wheel took place. The two ages are complementary: the Greek is antithetical, the Christian primary, and each had its origins in the union of divinity and human female at the mid-point of the preceding era. Greece began with "bird and woman blotting out some corner of the Babylonian mathematical starlight" - A Vision (1937), p.278. It passed away in the Dark Ages at about 1050 A.D. Its successor had already been conceived, when the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove had descended to Mary and the characteristics of the new millenium had been established.

Homeric mythology provided Yeats with the key to the annunciation which held the potential destruction of the Hellenic world. Homer's heroine, Helen of Troy, was not only Maud Gonne in Yeats' eyes, but also Leda's daughter and the unwitting instrument of Zeus' "predestined will". The rape of Leda symbolically anticipated the rape of Troy, the prefiguration of the end of an era in devastation, betrayal and slaughter:

"The broken wall, the burning roof and tower  
And Agamemnon dead"

- C.P. 241.

The annunciation to Leda ushered in the Greek civilization. In Yeats' system the epic period brought civil life and a desire for order to replace the anarchy of the Greek tribal invasions. The concept of personal independence in life and thought

developed. Yeats saw in this antithetical era the maturing of the personality, the discovery of solitude and the proliferation of the arts, with clarity, meaning and elegance exceeding all other virtues. He wrote to George Russell (A E) in May of 1900 stressing that

"All ancient vision was definite and precise" and that he himself avoided any words which seemed either "poetical" or "modern". - Letters, p.343.

Yeats felt incapable of accepting the Christian world and turned to the paganism of Homer. Christianity exalted humility and self-sacrifice; it subordinated the individual man to a remote, transcendent God. In Calvary the self-sufficient heron stands proudly apart from the crucifixion:

"God has not died for the whit heron"  
- C. Plays, 449.

Christianity was the return of the irrational which the Syrian foresaw in The Resurrection. Its closest approximation was the Dionysian cult which the Greek of the play could not accept as a part of his own civilization:

"I cannot think all that self-surrender and self-abasement is Greek, despite the Greek name of its god. When the goddess came to Achilles in the battle she did not interfere with his soul, she took him by his yellow hair."  
- C. plays, 587.

The juxtaposition of the religions centring upon the mutilated but reborn Eastern gods Dionysus and Christ is related to the repeat-in-history theories of Yeats and Ezra Pound, which the songs of the play echo in Homeric

terms derived from Vergil's Fourth Eclogue prophecies:

"Another Troy must rise and set  
Another lineage feed the crow."

- C. Plays, 580.

The gyres were bound to revolve and a Second Coming was expected to end the primary age of Christianity and reintroduce the period with which Yeats' own nature had its affinities. Destruction was inevitable, but human life would continue and man would ultimately rejoice:

"Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;  
We that look on but laugh in tragic joy."

- C.P. 337.

Yeats described his personality as anithetical. He was predestined to choose Homer and his unchristened heart, because his own Christian, objective age was alien to him. J.B. Yeats had decreed that art was not an escape from life but a reaction to it, and that personality and the individual man were all-important. His son accepted the supremacy of the individual and celebrated the Homeric era as the embodiment of this concept. His own surroundings compelled a reaction. He was a seeker after epic in non-epic times, fated to be in opposition to the prevailing atmosphere. His ideal was "that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body",<sup>17</sup> an integration of all parts of the man, which could result in complete self-fulfilment. The modern age could not permit the satisfaction of this desire.

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<sup>17</sup> Essays and Introductions, p.518.

According to the system, one could expect the twentieth century to produce decline and violence. As early as 1905 Yeats describes the unreceptivity of his times to poetic endeavour in terms of Homer himself:

"When the individual life no longer delights in its own energy, when the body is not made strong and beautiful by the activities of daily life, when men have no delight in decorating the body, one may be certain that one lives in a passing order, amid the inventions of a fading vitality. If Homer were alive today, he would only resist, after a deliberate struggle, the temptation to find his subject not in Helen's beauty, that every man has desired, nor in the wisdom and endurance of Odysseus, that has been the desire of every woman that has come into the world, but in what somebody would describe, perhaps, as "the inevitable contest" arising out of economic causes, between the country-places and small towns on the one hand, and, upon the other, the great city of Troy, representing one knows not what tendency to centralization."

- "The Well of the Saints", Essays and Introductions, p.302.

The unheroic preoccupations of the modern age contrast demonstrably with Homer's emphasis on an examination of basic humanity in its archetypal form:

"A description in the Iliad or the Odyssey, unlike one in the Aeneid or in most modern writers, is the swift and natural observation of a man as he is shaped by life."

- "Discoveries", Essays and Introductions, p.277.

Yeats looked back with nostalgia to the epic age, when the poet's skill was venerated and his legacy eagerly preserved by posterity. The modern poet was denied the conditions which gave the epic writer the incentive towards greatness: a receptive audience and a unified tradition in which to work.

That the twentieth century was hostile to the achievement of comparable self-fulfilment was obvious to Yeats. Maud Gonne had been a woman of epic stature; an unworthy world had stifled her and distorted her talents. The great aristocracy of Ireland had been cast down by mediocre democracy:

"The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,  
Till that be tumbled that was lifted high  
And discord follow upon unison,  
And all things at one common level lie."  
- C.P. 107.

In a letter of March 1929 Yeats admits a fear that the world's last great poetic period was over. He couches his lament in the onomatopoeic description which Pound feels to be the characteristic achievement of Homer:

"Though the great song return no more,  
There's keen delight in what we have -  
A rattle of pebbles on the shore  
Under the receding wave."  
- Letters, p.759.

The remnants of a tradition lingered on but it was now impossible to recapture the freshness of the words of Arcady. The ideal of supreme art remained: Yeats defines it in his Autobiographies, p.490 as

"a traditional statement of certain heroic and religious truths, passed on from age to age, modified by individual genius, but never abandoned."

The mythologies which expressed those truths enriched Yeats' work and in turn were revitalized by his unique interpretations of them. This, however, was a "passing order", as he could

see by the waste land themes of poetry and prose and by personal experience of his country's disturbances. The Second Coming was at hand and Pegasus was still without a rider comparable with Homer. Yet Yeats urged himself on before Homer's example, towards the expression of life as he had seen it:

"Homer had not sung  
Had he not found it certain beyond dreams  
That out of life's own self-delight had sprung  
The abounding glittering het."

- C.P. 225.

His opposition to the world in which he lived was the inevitable result of the antithetical nature with which he had been burdened. Homer's example from the apex of attainment stood before him in his despondent summary of the impossible task of re-establishing the epic tradition in a hostile setting:

"But all is changed, that high horse riderless,  
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode  
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood."

- C.P. 276.



#### IV

"Eleanor  
"Ελευνδρος and "Ελεπτολις, and  
poor old Homer blind  
blind as a bat,  
Ear, ear for the sea-surge;  
rattle of old men's voices."  
- Ezra Pound, VII : 28.<sup>1</sup>

Illustrating the Homeric influences present in the modern period, W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound form "two halves of a tally stick" in their dependence upon Homer's poems. While neither concentrated exclusively on one particular epic, Yeats' sympathies clearly lie with the Iliad and Pound's with the Odyssey. In his early years Yeats was attracted to the heroes and fair ladies of romance, whom in his maturity he identified with Achilles and Helen. His Autobiographies describes a childhood reading of an Iliad translation; Pound's Canto LXXX recalls a schooldays' memory which may similarly be regarded as symbolic:

"and it was old Spencer (,H) who first declaimed me the Odyssey"  
- LXXX: 547.

This teacher at the Cheltenham Military Academy revealed the rhythm and melody of Homer to his pupil; the attachment to the Odyssey was confirmed by a decision made at a Paris bookstall "in the year of grace 1906, 1908 or 1910."<sup>2</sup> Unable to afford the two companion volumes of Homer which were on sale,

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1 References to the Cantos are from The Cantos of Ezra Pound (Faber & Faber, London, 1968). Roman numerals indicate canto numbers, Arabic numerals give page references.

2 Ezra Pound, Literary Essays, ed. and intro. T.S. Eliot, (London, 1968), p. 259.

Pound chose the Odyssey, in a 1538 Latin translation by Andreas Divus Justinopolitanus, and by 1924 he had placed the canto based on a version of Divus' Nekuia at the beginning of his "history of the world".<sup>3</sup>

Pound's preference for the Odyssey was in harmony with the post-war sensibility, in which the community of interests had given way to an individual confrontation with the world. Odysseus seemed to be recognized as an outsider, as Stanford describes him in The Ulysses Theme, a man superior in intelligence and cunning in contrivance, but only tolerated by those to whom he was inferior in birth and possessions. Pound uses this aspect of Odysseus in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", when E.P. is identified with him,

". . . seeing he had been born  
In a half savage country, out of date;"  
- Collected Shorter Poems (London, 1968), p. 205.

Yeats had his roots in an Iliadic society of nobleman and peasant, of heroic legends and fatal beauties. Pound became by choice and circumstances rootless and wandering. His age favoured the persona of Odysseus and his own nature encouraged the identification. He therefore left his unreceptive homeland, to "sail after knowledge" and to gain experience, both literary and personal. He became an exile, a rebel against established society's views, encountering in history and in his own life parallels to Odysseus' career which enabled him

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3 Quoted in Forrest Read (ed.), Pound/Joyce, (London, 1968), p. 3.

to express a valid judgment of his times.

Like Yeats, Pound revered Homer as the head of an ancient tradition. This admiration, however, went deeper, and in a different direction from that of Yeats, who had been chiefly interested in the bardic line from which he saw himself descended. Pound's didactic impulse and his self-educational programme of emulating the great poetic masters before developing his own style were the motivating forces behind his regard for Homer's works. Yet he too was attracted by the idea of being a spiritual descendant of Homer: in a letter of 1916<sup>4</sup> he shows obvious delight in the understanding that his "Russonymic" would be Homerovitch.

Pound believed that neither he nor any of the writers to whom he offered advice could learn his craft

"Save by first-hand, untrammelled, unprejudiced examination of the finest examples of all these sorts of verse, of the finest strophes and of the finest rhyme-schemes. . ."

- "The Tradition" (1913), Literary Essays, p.93.

This "return to origins" was invigorating, because it was "a return to nature and reason". Homer was one of those who had been an innovator or a "first known example", and of an epic poet was deserving of particular respect. Charles Norman<sup>5</sup> records Pound's views, expressed while in St. Elizabeth's, that the words "major poet" could be applied only to a writer of epic. Yeats, therefore, not being a Homer or a Dante could only be "the greatest minor poet who

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4 D.D. Paige (ed.) The Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907-1941. (New York, 1950), p.92.

5 Charles Norman, Ezra Pound, (New York, 1960), p.444.

ever lived!" Like Yeats, Pound recognized the difficulties faced by the modern poet who might aspire to writing epics:

"The past epos has succeeded when all or a great many of the answers were assumed, at least between author and audience, or a great mass of audience. The attempt in an experimental age is therefore rash."  
- The Paris Review, Summer-Fall, 1962, p. 47.

The problems being faced, the effort was still worthwhile, and epic subjects were still present, such as "the struggle for individual rights", which could be related to the themes of Odysseus and of usury in the Cantos. Pound's definition of an epic as "a poem containing history" permits an interpretation of the Cantos as his attempt to emulate Homer the original epic-writer, using Odysseus as a basic protagonist and aiming to re-establish the unity of poet and audience, by providing his own answer to his plea to W.H.D. Rouse for

"Some means of communicating the Classics to the great mass of people, by no means fore-ordained to eternal darkness, who weren't taught Greek in infancy."  
- Letters, Dec. 1934, p.262.

Pound was deeply disturbed by the decline of the classics and the general ignorance which led his readers and critics to complain against the unintelligibility of his polyglot composition. He felt that there was little in his writings which would not ultimately be explained by the context, that the foreign interpolations would be merely "underlinings" and that a complete sense would exist without them. He explains their value in his "Note to Base Censor":

"In like manner citations from Homer or Sophokles or Confuscius are brief, and serve to remind the ready reader that we were not born yesterday."

- Paris Review, op. cit., p. 17.

The method of recalling past literature by direct quotations was associated with a desire to educate. Admitting that some passages could not be understood without a knowledge of Greek, he wrote:

"... if I can drive the reader to learning at least that much Greek, she or he will indubitably be filled with a durable gratitude. And if not what harm? I can't conceal the fact that the Greek language existed."

- Letters, January 1934, p.250.

It was this concern for the standard of education which preoccupied Pound in connection with the classical tradition. From the time of his enrolment at the University of Pennsylvania at the age of fifteen, he experienced the same frustrating scholarly myopia which had beset nineteenth-century England. Abstruse topics monopolized attention at the expense of literary values as a whole. Pound recalled being:

"chiefly impressed by lack of correlation between different depts. and lack either of general survey of literature or any coherent interest in literature as such (as distinct for example from philology)."

- "Ezra Pound. An Autobiographical Outline", Paris Review, op. cit., p. 19.

He regretted the decline of the classics, which were becoming more and more

"a baton exclusively for the cudgelling of school-boys, and less and less a diversion for the mature."

- "Translators of Greek: Early Translators of Homer", Literary Essays, p.249.

He himself felt handicapped by having been "well taught his Latin and very ill-taught his Greek."

Pound enlisted W.H.D. Rouse in his campaign against the "black ignorance" of his generation. His personal explanation for the "obsolescence and decline of G. and Latin studies" was, as one might expect, economic. Granted this economic "sabotage and obstruction", the problem to be faced was that of the impoverishment of life through the loss to the world of

"a kind of contact with and love for the classics which it had, not only in the 18th Century and in the Renaissance (part snobism), but throughout the Middle Ages, when in one sense it knew much less."

- Letters, December 1934, p.262.

Pound's solution was two-fold: a revised curriculum emphasizing the Poundian classics, and a programme of supervised Homeric translation. He was to supply the reading guide himself, and Rouse was deputed to produce an Odyssey, because Pound was busy on jobs which demanded "all the brains I've got", and because in any case he was "too goddamn iggurunt of Greek" - Letters, May, 1935, p.274.

Homer invariably figured in Pound's prescriptions, in company with Confucius, Ovid and other selected Roman poets, Dante, the troubadours and Minnesänger, Villon, Voltaire and nineteenth-century French writers, particularly Flaubert and Gautier. The beginning of Canto VII provides a poetic counterpart to this guide, with a history of the great in

literature from Homer through Ovid, Dante, the troubadours and Flaubert to Henry James and Pound's own contemporaries. The reading and studying of these writers would provide "a minimum basis for a sound and liberal education in letters"<sup>6</sup> for the aspiring young poet and for the man whose teaching in the classics had been scanty and grammar-orientated. Homer acted as a touchstone for assessing "the maxima of poetry"<sup>7</sup> and Pound encouraged the development of a critical faculty as a secondary activity while reading Homer,

"in order not to be fooled by tricks, by  
second-hand sleight of hand derivations."  
- Impact, p.89.

The study of the great classics was justified by Pound in "A Retrospect" (1917-18) in which he established his concept of the value of past literature to the modern writer and his reasons for giving particular attention to specific periods:

"My pawing over the ancients and semi-ancients has been one struggle to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain that we come on these feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual gradations. Each age has its own abounding gifts, yet only some ages transmute them into matters of duration."  
- Literary Essays, p.11.

Homer was one of those whose particular gifts were unsurpassed

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6 "How to Read"(1928), Literary Essays, p.38.

7 Noel Stock (Ed.) "A Visiting Card"(1942), Impact, (Chicago, 1960), p.67.

and whose work was of lasting quality. He was a necessary model for the writer of epic; Vergil, just as certainly, was not. To Pound he was a "second-rater, a Tennysonianized version of Homer!"<sup>8</sup> He endorsed Propertius' mockery of Vergil's pretensions:

"Make way, ye Roman authors,  
clear the streets, O ye Greeks,  
For a much larger Iliad is on the course of construction  
(and to Imperial order)  
Clear the streets, O ye Greeks!"  
- Collected Shorter Poems, p.246.

Criticism of Vergil served to illustrate in comparison the ideal qualities of Homer as epic-writer:

"Virgil is a man on a perch. All these writers of pseudo épopée are people on perches. Homer and the author of the Poema del Cid are keen on their stories. Milton and Virgil are concerned with decorations and trappings, and they muck about with a moral."  
- "The Renaissance", Literary Essays, p.217.

It was the qualities peculiar to Homer that Pound insisted be brought out by translation. Although the twentieth century might feel greater affinities with the Roman situation, which held similar problems to those of modern times, empire and the Metropolis, while the Greeks "had no world outside"<sup>9</sup> with which to deal, the poet had much to learn from the Greeks, and above all, from Homer, whom Pound constantly affirmed to be "the best Greek".<sup>10</sup>

Of supreme importance to the poet learning his craft was the example of Homer's technical ability. Pound's

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8 Letters, July 1916, p.87.

9 Letters, July 1916, p.87.

10 Letters, January 1934, p.252.



praise focused upon the "magnificent onomatopoeia" and the "authentic cadence of speech"<sup>11</sup> which the quotation from Canto VII at the head of this chapter evokes. He was deeply concerned to encourage Rouse in an effort to transfer those qualities to the English translation. As early as mid-1916, eighteen years before his correspondence with Rouse, he was writing of Greek as "a store-house of wonderful rhythms"<sup>12</sup> which most English translations failed to capture, and emphasizing "the movement of the words"<sup>13</sup> in Greek, which he prized highly. "The miracle of Homer", he wrote to Rouse "is that great poetry is everywhere latent and that the literary finish is up to Henry James."<sup>14</sup>

The main aims in Homeric translation, in Pound's view, were to achieve fidelity to the original meaning and atmosphere, and to retain Homer's vigorous narrative movement and the individual inflection of the voice. "The chief impression in reading Homer is freshness. . . . A trans. that misses that is bad" - Letters, June 1935, p.275. Pound made it abundantly clear that a good translator's concern was with style and atmosphere, not merely with words. Above all, he detested "adorned translations" and reacted violently and characteristically when he found Rouse straying from the Poundian dictates:

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- 11 "Early Translators of Homer", Literary Essays, p.250.  
 12 Letters, July 1916, p.87.  
 13 Letters, August 1916, p.91.  
 14 Letters, April 1935, p.273.

"No No! Doc: Here you are backslidin' on all your highly respectable principles and slinging in licherary langwidg and puttin' yer sentences all out of whack. . . Tain't what a man sez, but wot he means that the traducer has got to bring over, the implication of the word."  
 - Letters, March 1935, p.271.

Adornment of the original text was unfortunately present even in Chapman, whom Pound considered nevertheless the best of the English versions. Pope was acceptable though out of fashion, but the nadir was reached in the Leaf-Lang prose translations whose influence upon Rouse Pound fought to counteract.

These judgments were made in Pound's study of "Early Translators of Homer";<sup>15</sup> during which essay he used as a basis for his survey a passage from the Iliad: III, which he was to incorporate into the Cantos. As it stands in Canto II it illustrates Pound's central concerns in relation to Homer's poetic skill, the cadence of speech and the untranslatable onomatopoeia of the waves:

" And poor old Homer blind, blind as a bat,  
 Ear, ear for the sea-surge, murmur of old men's voices:  
 'Let her go back to the ships,  
 Back among Grecian faces, lest evil come on our own,  
 Evil and further evil, and a curse cursed on our  
 children. . ."

- II : 10.

The Homeric epithet which Pound transliterates as "poluphloisboious" represents the ultimate onomatopoeic achievement, and it is as such that Pound uses it in his poems, just as the more generally used "wine-dark" recurs

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<sup>15</sup> Literary Essays, pp. 249-275.

among other poets to recall the characteristic Homeric atmosphere, and to indicate the relationship of a passage to the classical tradition. In this way the "dark seas" of Canto I and the "wine-red glow in the shallows" of Canto II retain a subtle echo of the original Homer, while the wave which runs in the beach-grove speaks with the true Homeric voice, of Troy's tragic dilemma. In "Moeurs Contemporaines" Pound's personal Homeric epithet figures in the description of the protagonist who, in the classical manner,

"lies by the poluphloisboious sea-coast"  
- C.S.P. p.199.

In the Pisan Cantos Pound finds a constant in an overturned world through memories of having heard for himself the changeless rhythm of water

"flowing toward the Villa Catullo  
where with sound ever moving  
in diminutive poluphloisboious  
in the stillness outlasting all wars. . ."  
- LXXIV; 453.

Yet for a poet to learn from Homer's example it was necessary for him to attempt to emulate the master. Yeats' effort stays close to the original words:

"The rattle of pebbles on the shore  
Under the receding wave."  
- C.P. p.271.

Pound was more ambitious and less readily satisfied. He wrote to Rouse of his admiration for the Odyssey and his

own concentration upon depth in translation:

"Para thina poluphloisboio thalosses: the  
turn of the wave and the scutter of  
receding pebbles.  
Years' work to get that. Best I have  
been able to do is cross cut in "Mauberley",  
lead up to:

imaginary  
Audition of the phantasmal sea-surge,'  
which is totally different, and a different  
movement of the water, and inferior."

- Letters, May 1935, p.274.

A really good translation was invaluable and its creation was "so enormous an undertaking" that "the requirements include all the possible masteries of English". Pound's proselytising instinct drove him to seek out worthwhile versions of the classics, in order to introduce his friends and readers to works from which their deficient education had previously excluded them. He promised to pass on to them the completed Rouse translation, having previously been unable to slake their interest.

"as they are all too sensitive to read the tushery provided by "adorned" translations, though they might stick a couple of pages of Pope and a dozen or so of Chapman."

- Letters, December 1934, p.262.

The didactic impulse had earlier found its outlet, in relation to translation, in Pound's essays on the literary tradition, among which he pays particular attention to two early Homeric translators, Hugues Salel and Andreas Divus. Each offers an introduction to the influence of Homer on Pound's subject matter. A fragment of French from Salel in Canto XX is used to point up the "repeat in

history" theme for which the Iliad provides the archetypal expression. The scene is drawn from Lope de Vegas' play on the siege of Toro:

"Under the battlement  
(Epi purgo) peur de la hasle."  
- XX : 95.

The Greek recalls the old men "upon the wall" of Troy. The introduction of their "fear of sunburn" is apparently peculiar to Salel and provides a stepping stone from the Greek to the Spanish setting, in which the beauty of another Helen makes its impact:

"My God what a woman" said the King telo rigido."

The theme of abduction and avenging siege is treated in sections of Propertius which Pound translates. These establish the moment of temptation and the exploitation of trust, taking the Homeric example as its pattern:

"Eyes are the guides of love,  
Paris took Helen naked coming from the bed of  
Menelaus."  
- C.S.P. p.237.

"A Trojan and adulterous person came to Menelaus  
under the rites of hospitium."  
- C.S.P. p.245.

Pound retained the parallels for his Cantos, in which the "repeat in history" had, by his own account, a leading place.<sup>16</sup> The method of using recurrent motifs establishes a sense of continuity in history through the persistence of the "eternal triangle" theme, especially in the civilizations which held a particular appeal for Pound: the Provencal

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<sup>16</sup> Letters, April 1927, p.285.

and Chinese. The most explicit parallel is drawn by Pound himself from the life of a troubadour, Peire de Maensac, who

"had De Tierci's wife and with the war they made:  
                   Troy in Auvergnat  
 While Menelaus piled up the church at port  
 He kept Tyndarida."  
                   - V : 22.

This is an account of an abductor whose success exceeded even Paris' achievement; in contrast the Chinese Troy meets a brief but bloody fate:

"and at Ho Ci'u destroyed the whole town  
 for hiding a woman, *K'ünya deüa*  
                   - LXXXIV : 573.

It was the "dread Cythera" aspect of Helen which Pound blamed for the fall of Troy. The Trojans had failed to act upon the recognition by the old men on the walls of the dangerous nature of Helen's beauty. Experience saw in her the destructive side of Aphrodite:

"Moves, yes she moves like a goddess  
 . . .  
 And doom goes with her in walking."  
                   - II : 10.

The fate of the doomed city is revealed within two cantos of the prophecy:

"Palace in smoky light,  
 Troy but a heap of smouldering boundary stones."  
                   - IV : 17.

This is the ultimate horror of civilization: the devastation of the city and the dispersal of its surviving citizens. Troy had aroused the gods against it, and perished. Cadmus,

in contrast, accepted the gods' incomprehensible order to sow the teeth of the slaughtered dragon and reaped a harvest of men with whose help he built Thebes. Yet while Troy remains the archetype of destruction, it stands also for the rebirth of a new western civilization based on the Greek literature descending from Homer, and on the Roman world which traced its origins to the Trojan Aeneas and which was succeeded by the Italian Renaissance. The Trojan ancestry of the Italian civilization is traced in Canto XX, in the context of the delirious ramblings of Niccolo d'Este:

"And that was when Troy was down  
And they came here and cut holes in rock,  
Down Rome way, and put up the timbers;  
And came here, condit Atesten. . ."

- XX : 94-5.

Troy, then, had a mystic value as the starting point in the history of western man. Nevertheless, it was only remembered because of the capacity of the poet to raise to prominence or commit to oblivion any person or event with which he dealt. Pound understood this potent gift and chose to include two versions of the theme in his collection of "the classics in paraphrase". Both make specific use of the enduring quality of Troy's story despite the passing of its material form:

" Troy  
Whither, O city, are your profits and your gilded  
shrines,  
And your barbecues of great oxen,  
And the tall women walking your streets, in gilt  
clothes,  
With their perfumes in little alabaster boxes?  
Where is the work of your home-born sculptors?





the histories of two women, one actively destructive, the other the passive instrument of destruction by succumbing to temptation: they are the two sides of woman, the twin daughters of Leda, Clytemnestra and Helen, the active and passive elements of Cythera *deivá*. "Pernella concubina" represents the woman who takes direct and ruthless steps to achieve her desire:

"Wishing her son to inherit  
 Expecting the heir ainé be killed in battle  
 He being courageous, poisoned his brother puiné"  
 - XXIX : 146.

The lady Cunizza, like Helen, was abducted:

"And Sordello subtracted her from that husband  
 And lay with her in Tarviso"  
 - XXIX : 147.

Clytemnestra remains, in her appearances in the Cantos, the more sinister figure. Both she and Helen obey the laws of the poem, being revealed now in their own forms to evoke the theme of a "repeat in history", now as the subjects of a metamorphosis into women whose similarity to their originals is implicit in their situation. The source of Pound's interest in the murder of Agamemnon may not be directly Homeric, but the relationship of Clytemnestra to Helen and the recurrent mention of the fate of the Greek leader in the Odyssey seem sufficient justification for regarding the Agamemnon story as relevant to the Homeric aspect of Pound's works. His own judgment of the great Greek dramatists was that they

"decline from Homer, and depend immensely on him for their effects; their 'charge', at its highest potential, depends so often, and so greatly on their being able to count on their audience's knowledge of the Iliad."

- "How to Read", Literary Essays, p.27.

They were, therefore, providing a second-hand reworked version of Homer's original account, and were simply another way of approaching the material.

Canto V shows a progression in the love theme from the purity of the waiting bride Danaë and the joy of the marriage ceremony of Aurunculeia, through a Sapphic lament for unrequited love, to records of seduction, adultery and desertion, culminating in the triumphant establishment of "Troy in Auvergnat". But behind this is the dark vision of jealousy and murder, the assassination of Renaissance princes by their own close relatives, amid echoes of Clytemnestra's crime. Reinforcing the Atreides' theme is the Dantean promise, "Caina attende", of the waiting circle of hell reserved for the betrayers of family.

The curse on the House of Atreus, which worked itself out in the infidelity and deaths of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, had its origins in cannibalism. Pound unites the ritual of the eating of human flesh with that of the atrocities committed in the name of love in Canto IV : 20 -

"Polhonac,  
As Gyges on Thracian platter set the feast,  
Cabestan, Terreus,  
It is Cabestan's heart in the dish,"

As Walter Baumann <sup>17</sup> suggests, Polhonac and Gyges, who exposed their wives to the attentions of other men, and Cabestan and Tereus, victim and villain in parallel cannibalistic episodes, are all related to the themes of murder and adultery which find their classic expression in the Atreides' tragedy. Poundian "repeats in history" of Clytemnestra's story are provided in the Cantos. The first is a Renaissance Italy example: Clytemnestra had suffered ultimately for her sins, though her sister was

"led back, living home,"  
 "And, in Este's house, Parisina  
 Paid  
 For this tribe paid always, and the house  
 Called also Atreides"

- VIII : 36.

The second comes from Pound's Chinese history:

"Litse thought to gain Ousan,  
       roused Ousan and Ousan  
 remembered his father  
       dead by the hand of Litse."

- LVIII : 338.

This reference functions as a reminder of the violence inherent in the succession of civilizations, as has previously been demonstrated by the Italian cantos, and maintains the link between the Greeks and Chinese which scattered brief allusions to the Homeric figures have created. The Chinese heritage is intended to appear as a parallel to that of Greece, just as there is to be a new, American renaissance, Chinese-based, whereas the earlier Renaissance had drawn its inspiration from Greek.

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17 Walter Baumann, The Rose in the Steel Dust (Bern, 1967), p.48.

The last words on the murder of Agamemnon come from the victim himself. Canto LXXVIII recalls Odysseus' meeting in Hades with his former leader, whose thoughts revolve around the pitiful death of Cassandra and the implacability of Clytemnestra. Presumably speaking from the land of the dead, Agamemnon regrets having brought the Trojan princess to "an ill house". The comparable passage in the Nekuia leads on to a discussion and condemnation of the wicked ways of women. Odysseus exclaims, in Rouse's 1937 translation:

"Indeed there is no doubt that Zeus allseeing has been the deadly foe of the house of Atreus from the beginning, and he has always used the schemes of women. For Helen's sake how many of us fell! and for you, Clytemnestra was laying her plot while you were far away!"

From Homer himself comes the emphasis on destructive femininity, with Clytemnestra as active and Helen as passive agent.

The metamorphosis of the doom-enshrouded Helen is a continuous process throughout the Cantos. Not only does she merge into a variety of ill-fated women, but herself undergoes a gradual change from individual to abstraction. Eleanor of Aquitaine provides an early parallel for Pound, who uses the epithets bestowed upon Helen by Aeschylus in the Agamemnon, as illustrated by the quotation prefixed to this chapter, to establish the identification of name and character. Dido, fated to unhappiness in love, is another dimension of Helen, and also contains Odyssean

elements in her enforced sea-voyage and her founding of a new order at Carthage. Sigismondo Malatesta's poem in praise of Isotta degli Atti introduces a further pair of beautiful women, whose love had brought tragedy.

Isotta, he writes,

" , . hath not Helen for peer  
Yseut nor Batsabe."  
- VIII : 34.

The theme of fatal beauty remains strong in the Cantos, but Helen's role tends to be limited to the earlier cantos. Her power over men reappears in Canto XCI in the form of the face that launched a thousand ships. Here she belongs in the tradition of wars fought for a woman's sake, in the company of two famous "destroyers of ships": Elizabeth Tudor, for whom Drake had faced the Spanish Armada, and Cleopatra, whose fleeing ships at Actium had brought defeat to her Roman lover. The "repeat in history" of great queens in whose cause sea battles were fought is conveyed through the intermediary poem of Hérédia, "Antoine et Cléopâtre":

"Et sur elle courbé, l'ardent Imperator  
Vit dans ses larges yeux étoilés de points d'or  
Toute une mer immense où fuyaient des galères."

Antony's vision is transferred to Drake, who sees

"in the Queen's eye the reflection  
& sea-wrack- "  
- XCI : 646.

A beautiful woman, typified by Helen, could be a

destroyer of men, ships and cities in Homeric times and even later. Another destructive force, however, was increasingly present in the world, Usura, and it is to her that Pound transfers Helen's Aeschylean epithets:

"Aurum est commune sepulchrum. Usura, commune sepulchrum.  
helandros kai heleptolis kai helarxe."  
- XLVI : 245.

Yeats had doubted the chances of the survival of Homer's story unscathed into the twentieth century;<sup>18</sup> Pound's economic preoccupations made Helen's metamorphosis inevitable.

A transformation more appropriate to Helen's original nature is that implied in the Pisan Cantos. She merges with the nymphs and goddesses who are part of the Mediterranean fertility religions, and becomes absorbed into the abundant Earth itself:

"Mist covers the breasts of Tellus-Helena and drifts up  
the Arno"  
- LXXVII : 503.

Through Helen, the archetypal woman returns to her origins as bountiful nature, around which was constructed the Eleusinian rites of Kore and Demeter, Aphrodite and Bacchus. Helen is ideal woman and the fertile earth in a single image as indicated by the juxtaposition of ideas in the following extract, which itself is placed within a canto whose content is derived from the mysteries of Eleusis:

"as from the breasts of Helen, a cup of white gold  
2 cups for three altars. Tellus *yea* feconda".

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18 See above Ch.III, p.98.

In the Pisan Cantos she becomes one with the female deities who fill the whole poem and whose significance is incomplete without the male principle represented by Odysseus. The chthonic mystery religions celebrate the eternal miracle of the rebirth of vegetation, in terms of ritual copulation. Adonis is an example of the victim of the orgiastic mother-goddess; the advice to Odysseus in Canto XLVII is the counterpart of the moly given to him by Hermes - it is a protection against the destructive nature of woman and a direction of his efforts towards the male task of bringing shape to chaos. Man must plow the waiting earth, establish his control over woman, and become victor over Circe's charms. The alternative is contained in the fate of Adonis and symbolised by the bull running blindly on the sword, victim of the chaos, the octopus that is woman. Tiresias' advice sets before Odysseus the male/female opposition which he must resolve, and reinforces Agamemnon's warning to Odysseus in the Nekyia that he should establish his male superiority and avoid placing his trust in a female:

"Then take warning now yourself, and never be too kind even to your wife. Never tell her all you have in your mind; you may tell something, but keep something to yourself." "

- W.H.D. Rouse, The Odyssey (N.Y., 1960), p.124.

Thus the Iliad provides Pound with the archetypal woman and the Odyssey supplies the man. Through the medium

of the second of Pound's two favourite Homeric translations, Cantos I forms a link between Homer's poems, just as in the Odyssey the Nekuia serves to recall the background material of the Iliad to its audience. In Canto I Helen and the fall of Troy lie beneath the surface of the poem, as Odysseus consults his guide and prepares to sail after knowledge.

" 'A second time? why? man of ill star,  
 'Facing the sunless dead and this joyless region. . ?' "  
 - I : 8.

Just as the initial quotation from VII:28 outlines Pound's basic Homeric interest outside the content of the Odyssey: Helen's beauty, its evil power and the historical repetitions of her story, together with the essential characteristics of Homer's poetry, so Tiresias' question contains the elements of Pound's dependence on the Odyssey. In the passage from Canto I the three components of the "main scheme" of the Cantos are implicit: the repeat in history of a journey of discovery, the descent of a living man into the world of the dead, and the metamorphosis of Pound into Odysseus. The trials ahead for both voyagers are anticipated by the prophet's seeing his visitor as a "man of ill star".

Pound's self-identification with Odysseus is of long standing. K.K. Ruthven<sup>19</sup> cites, as the earliest example of this, a reference in T.P.'s Weekly (June 6, 1913), p.707,

<sup>19</sup> K.K. Ruthven, A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae (1926), (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), p.129.



in which Pound says he has "known many men's manners and seen many cities". During his years in Paris between 1921 and 1924 he was described by Louise G. Cann as "an Ulysses seeking his island"<sup>20</sup>, and for his poetry an explicit parallel was established in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" in 1920.

The choice of an Homeric character as the counterpart of an ineffectual modern man is significant for the twentieth century writer. Like Joyce's Leopold Bloom, E.P. aspires to the achievements of classical antiquity, but is unable to fulfil his ambitions. He is not impervious to the temptations of forbidden intellectual knowledge, nor has he other than a limited ability to direct his life; unlike Odysseus, skill in navigation eludes him and he remains held in "the chopped seas". His mission of carrying order to the Ithacan islands of Britain is unaccomplished, because the barbarous occupying hordes of an age of mass production demand tawdry, ephemeral pleasures and remain unimpressed by the poet's efforts.

Pound's self-appointed task of "resuscitating the dead art / Of poetry", as defined in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", is combined with the desire, of which he wrote to Rouse in 1934, of finding "some means of communicating the classics to the great mass of people".<sup>21</sup> These aims find their expression in the Cantos. In "A Visiting Card" (1942)<sup>22</sup>

20 Michael Reck, Ezra Pound, A Close-Up (N.Y., 1967), p.49.

21 Letters, December 1934, p.262 f.

22 Essay in Impact, Noel Stock (ed.), (Chicago, 1960), p.57.

he wrote of the various categories of literature, which included that which assists the young writer to learn his profession and form his own standards, and that which "may usefully be introduced from one country into another in order to nourish the intellectual life of the latter". The Odyssean framework of the Cantos provides an ordered method of dealing with the vast array of material which falls into these categories. Odysseus' voyage is a search for knowledge of all kinds and, as Tiresias recognizes in Canto I, the present traveller is asking advice for a second journey. He is no longer Odysseus but Odysseus-Pound, who incorporates the characteristics and background of both men and complies with the demands of the poem in being prepared to assume successive masks, as the focus of the Cantos moves over the panorama of history, legend and literature.

Odysseus' "facing the sunless dead" in the Nekyia permitted Homer to emphasize his hero's obligations to the natural forces, represented by the Olympian deities, and to extend the awareness of the audience forward to the prospective homecoming of Odysseus, backward to the immediate past of the voyager, and further to the remote legendary figures. Pound's Cantos employ the "Ulysses theme" in the same way: the reader is instructed on man's proper relationship to the gods, is informed of the autobiographical details which the author feels to be relevant to his poem's content, and, above all, is educated to a higher awareness of the literary heritage of twentieth-century man

and the factors in man and civilizations which hinder or promote order and stability.

Odysseus symbolizes the active force which deals constructively with the elements which erode the ideal society. Opposed to him are two groups: the usurious figures whose life-denying effect is represented by the Canto II episode of sailors whose greed obscures from them the recognition of Dionysus, divine embodiment of the life-force; and the passive aesthetes, foreshadowed by Mauberley and symbolized by the lotos-eaters of Canto XX, whose will to action has atrophied. Their pleasure-seeking torpor declines into indolence, as is indicated by their positioning in the Cantos between evocations of the action of epic battles and the descriptions of the leisure activities of the declining Renaissance Italian society.

"The live man among duds" is Pound's summary of Odysseus' superiority. His Homeric epithets are reiterated at strategic points throughout the Cantos, in order to remind the reader of the characteristics necessary if a man is to survive and fulfil his mission. Often they demonstrate the extent to which an Odyssean quality is taken to extremes, without the balance provided by the hero's other virtues. City-taking Malatesta, for instance, is placed in deliberate comparison with Homer's voyaging conqueror, but proves to have overdeveloped the ability to be "of many counsels":

"And it was his messianic year, Pollorcetes,  
but he was being a bit too POLUMETIS "  
- IX : 40.

Similarly, the knowledge of men and cities displayed by "Baldy Bacon" in Canto XII is not an Odyssean awareness of character but a crafty, corrupt use of experience for exploitation and personal profit. The investigation of Chinese history produces an Odysseus as well as a Clytemnestra, among other parallels with Greek culture:

"and Tchan-y was working for Tsin  
brain work POLLON IDEN "  
- LIII : 285.

A character similar to Odysseus in the context of ancient China helps to incorporate the Chinese Cantos into the general theme of a voyage of discovery and education. Again, the "repeat in history" mechanism links one era to another by a single significant phrase.

Odysseus, then, stands out as a "live man", whose brain as well as his body shows constant, calculated activity:

"Getting the feel of it, of his soul,  
while they were making a fuss about Helen"  
- XCVIII : 714.

Pound's Guide to Kulchur, p.352, places the Odyssey above the Iliad, because it deals with "intelligence set above brute force". To Rouse, Homer's versatile hero was described forcefully as a

"little runt who finally has to do all the hard work, gets all Don Juan's chances with the ladies and can't really enjoy 'em. Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa. Always some fly in the ointment, last to volunteer on stiff jobs." - Letters, April 1935, p.273.

The picture of Odysseus' stratagem of feigning insanity to avoid the "stiff job" of the Trojan war remained with Pound, and appears in the Cantos as an example of fruitless labour:

" (...Odysseus furrowed the sand.) "  
- XXIII : 111.

Despite his description of Odysseus as a Mauberleian figure, missing all his "chances with the ladies", Pound places particular emphasis in the Cantos on the erotic adventures of his hero. This concentration on selected aspects of Homer's many-sided man is a common tendency, as Stanford's The Ulysses Theme demonstrates. The experience to be gained on the voyage was to be both intellectual and sexual. The mind was given literary stimulation; the body had to learn Eleusinian abandonment.

The vigorous male force typified by Odysseus has, in the Cantos, to establish a fitting relationship with the potentially dangerous female element. Man could either perish like a moth at a flame, or become a husbandman, tiller of the fertility of the earth. The passages in the Cantos which are concerned with the chthonic mysteries disclose the opportunities for power over the untamed elements, symbolised by wild beasts. Pound uses the legend of the Bacchae to illustrate the fate of a man who denies the fertility god and his rites:

"And you Pentheus,  
Had as well listen to Tiresias, and to Cadmus,  
or your luck will go out of you."  
- II : 13.

The admonition has concealed application to Odysseus, that he should follow the advice of a prophet and a god-fearing man. Not to obey is to court disaster such as the terrible death of Pentheus who was torn to pieces by frenzied women.

Three Odyssean figures symbolise the relationships of man and women in the Cantos. The Nausicaa episode is sexually incomplete, an innocent encounter of youth and experience which adds still another dimension to the portrait of womankind in the poem. She appears as

"Beauty on an ass-cart  
Sitting on five sacks of laundry."  
- XXIX : 150.

Her role is one of anticipation, of a life at its beginnings.

"so Nausikaa  
took down the washing or at least went to see that the  
maids didn't slack  
or sat by the window. . . "  
- LXXVIII : 514.

Uncomplicated by opposition from the more shadowy Calypso, Circe is the supreme Homeric example in the Cantos of the seductress, of woman as mistress, and Canto XXXIX examines her role and that of woman as wife, for which Penelope, in or out of the Cantos, is the archetypal representative. Elpenor had fallen prey to the destructive side, Circe's spell: the hints of unnatural lusts which she could also encompass are revealed by the fact that she is a twin of Pasiphae, who had coupled with a bull and given birth to the Minotaur. The bride's song recalls Danaë and Aurunculeia,

and their contrasts with accounts of seduction and brutality.  
 Circe may be the handmaiden who aroused passion in her man,  
 but the wife retains it.

"Dark shoulders have stirred the lightning  
 A girl's arms have nested the fire,  
 Not I but the handmaid kindled  
                   Cantat sic nupta  
 I have eaten the flame."

- XXXIX : 204.

In place of the erotic temptations of the Circe figures,  
 Penelope the faithful wife offers serenity and permanence.

The Cantos, then, gives Odysseus-Pound the opportunity  
 to assimilate experiences of a varied nature, among which  
 the theme of man's proper relation to woman is one which  
 is particularly dependent upon Homeric allusions. The  
 combination of a quest with the gaining of a true awareness  
 of the nature of woman occurs in the evocation of Aeneas'  
 voyage away from his Trojan homeland:

"And that was when Troy was down, all right,  
                   superbo Ilion...  
 And they were sailing along  
 Sitting in the stern-sheets,  
 Under the lee of an island  
 And the wind drifting off from the island.  
 'Tet, tet...  
                   what is it?' said Anchises.  
 'Tethnéké', said the helmsman, 'I think they  
 'Are howling because Adonis died virgin.'  
 'Huh!tet...' said Anchises,  
                   'well, they've made a bloody mess of that city.'  
 And she said: 'Otreus, of Phrygia,  
                   'That king is my father...'  
                   and I saw then, as of waves taking form,  
 As the sea, hard, a glitter of crystal,  
 And the waves rising but formed, holding their form.  
 No light reaching through them."

- XXIII : 114.

Aeneas, whom Pound disliked, is ignored in favour of his father Anchises, whose significance for the theme of man and woman is greater. The passage describes the beginnings of a journey which was to bring tragedy to Dido and civilization to Italy. The death chant for Adonis is a reminder that union with the great Mother-goddess can be fatal. More successful was Anchises, whose encounter with Aphrodite returns to his memory at the sound of ritual lament for one of her victims. Yet even he is not fully aware of the mysteries, and has to ask for explication of the cries from the shore. The fall of Troy is ever-present in the minds of the survivors, and it too owed its fate to Aphrodite and her human surrogate, Helen.

Knowledge of the female element had to come from first-hand experience, as in the case of Anchises, and above all, of Odysseus. The value of a personal search for knowledge is implicit in Pound's definition of the word which he adopted to convey the concept of a journey with an educational purpose:

"periplum, not as land looks on a map  
but as sea bord seen by men sailing."

- LIX : 339.

A first-hand examination of life was a quality on which Pound placed great emphasis. Michael Reck<sup>23</sup> attributes Pound's preference for Frobenius' anthropological theories over Frazer's to the fact that Frobenius had actually seen

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<sup>23</sup> Reck, op. cit., p.49.



what he described.

In the Cantos Pound endorses his belief in the personal gaining of knowledge by citing historical examples of requirements for information found and put to good use:

"No trustees of the Salem Museum, who had not doubled  
both Good Hope and The Horn.

. . . . .

No man theign  
said Athelstan who has not made three voyages  
going hence off this land into other lands as a merchant

They say, that is the Norse engineer told me, that out past  
Hawaii

they spread threads from gun'ale to gun'ale  
in a certain fashion  
and plot a course of 3000 sea miles  
lying under the web, watching the stars"

- XLVIII : 252.

The Carthaginian explorer, Hanno, appears in the Cantos immediately following that canto in which Odysseus is educated by Circe, instructed on his subsequent course, and sent off "to hell in a boat". Logical succession would have demanded the content of Canto I to be introduced at this point, but the presence of a translation from Hanno's Periplus encourages the reader to see the episode as a "repeat in history" of the Odyssey. The Carthaginian, related to Odysseus by Victor Bérard's theory of a Phoenician derivation of Homer's poetic material, sails beyond the Pillars of Hercules which had been Odysseus' limit, and proceeds down the West African coast, into adventures which parallel those of his predecessor:

"Their folk wear the hides of wild beasts  
and threw rocks to stone us,  
so prevented our landing."

- XL : 208.

This was a literal repeat version of Odysseus' original version; the placing of the descent of Homer's hero into Hades and the advice given him for the shaping of his future, at the beginning of the Cantos suggests that the Homeric periplum must have been adapted by Pound to both literal and figurative uses. In its literal form, the Odyssey in the Cantos demonstrates the qualities of an archetypal hero in the situations with which an adventurous life inevitably presents him. It shows the eventual success of a man whose mind is receptive to new ideas and experiences, and whose curiosity and desire to learn impel him to investigate even those subjects which threaten to be dangerous. The whole of the Cantos thus becomes transformed into the periplum of its creator's mind, a voyage through time, space and literature in search of knowledge upon which a sound civilization may be built. Side-excursions and journeys within the larger journey function by supplying added dimensions to the concept of the periplum, and by extending the knowledge of the voyager. The "repeat in history" motif supplies illustrations of the theme and illustrates the place of the periplum in the civilizations of the past.

A journey which belongs to the last category is that of Niccolo d'Este, who travelled

"in his young youth, in the wake of Odysseus"

- XXIV : 116.

His voyage was a European "Grand Tour", which instructed the

young nobleman and countered incipient ignorance and parochialism. In "Section: Rock-Drill", the journeying of another figure from history is invested with symbolic meaning. Apollonius of Tyana travelled in the Homeric lands of the Near East and India in the first century A.D., and Pound is said to have seen in him the first meeting of East and West as a prefiguration of the unity which the poet longed to see.<sup>24</sup> The periplum of Apollonius is therefore incorporated into Pound's history of the world, because it fore-shadows the hoped-for conjunction of Pound's two great cultures through the coming of a Chinese-based American Renaissance.

Pound's own journeys have their place in the poem as minor periploi which remind him of experiences gained in his own past. Canto LXXIV recalls a return visit to the U.S.A. and his travels in the Mediterranean:

"and the cool of the 42nd St. tunnel (periplum)  
white-wash and horse cars, the Lexington Avenue cable  
and thence to Al Hambra, the lion court and el  
mirador de la reina Lindaraja  
orient reaching to Tangier, the cliffs the villa of  
Perdicaris  
Rais Uli, periplum"

- LXXIV : 475.

He remembers having been himself a modern Odysseus, approaching the Pillars of Hercules and knowing the cities of a people of whom Odysseus had known nothing.

Such memories exist within the wider limits of the Pisan Cantos, in which circumstances demand that the periplum of

24 Reck, op. cit., p.154.

Odysseus undergo a change of state from actual journey to a voyage of the mind. The sun gives a physical reminder of the constant repetition of the periplum, while at the same time suggesting the theories of the solar mythologists, that the voyages of Odysseus and similar heroes reflected the basic movement of the sun in the heavens, through the terrors of night and into daylight again.

That the Pisan Cantos gain unity as an imprisoned man's exploration of his own mind and memory, is hinted at in Pound's return back in time to his visit in London to "the studio on the Regent's Canal". The passage begins and ends with the word "periplum", which isolates it and suggests a digression of the mind into its own past. In contrast is the uncomfortable reality of constant vehicular travel, which precedes the episode in the same canto:

"(interlude entitled: periplum by camion)"

- LXXVII : 494.

The significance of the term "periplum" in the Pisan Cantos is emphasized by its being placed at the end of one of the last cantos in the section, just after the admission that

"the loneliness of death came upon me  
(at 3 P.M., for an instant)"

- LXXXII : 562.

The focus on periplum suggests the finality of the journey of experience and has the effect of summing up after a lengthy, retrospective meditation.

In these cantos Pound relives the horrors of Odysseus' adventures, preoccupied with the degradation and loss of identity which he feels himself to be undergoing. Tiresias' greeting in Canto I seems an unspoken prophecy which has been fulfilled: Pound is indeed a "man of ill-star" and inevitably aligns himself with the unlucky Elpenor,

"of no fortune and with a name to come"

- LXXIV : 466.

Worse than the unkindness of fate is the sensation of entrapment and destruction of personality. Odysseus' harrowing experience at the hands of Polyphemus is the parallel which Pound chooses, but what was a clever word-play to the hero is an ironic revelation of his true state to the poet:

"

ΟΥ ΤΙΣ

'I am noman, my name is noman' "

- LXXIV : 453.

The ultimate in degradation is the reduction to animal level. The metamorphosis of Odysseus' crew into swine overtakes Pound in the D.T.C. camp:

"ac ego in harum  
so lay men in Circe's swine-sty"

- LXXIV : 463.

Yet the suffering of Odysseus-Pound has its value in creating self-awareness and a sympathy for one's fellow-men. The unwarranted sack of the Cicones gave to the Odyssey, Pound felt, a crime and punishment motif<sup>25</sup>:

"no sooner out of Troas  
than the damn fools attacked Ismarus of the Cicones."

- LXXIX : 518.

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25 "Heli", Literary Essays, p.212.

In his opinion, Odysseus had shown too little respect for the lives of others, and in particular had scarcely cared for the survival of his crew. The lotophagoi in Canto XX make clear the unrewarded sufferings of the ordinary sailor, denied the pleasures and fame of their leader and vouchsafed only

"Poison and ear-wax,  
and a salt grave by the bull-field"  
- XX : 98.

Odysseus-Pound's recognition of universal brotherhood appears under the stress of imprisonment, when he identifies the other inmates as his "comes miseriae" (LXXIV :463). Eventually comes the acceptance of the justice of the command

"Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down."  
- LXXXII : 556.

Pound sees Odysseus and himself defeated, despite their "care and craft", by a combination of fate, the force beyond what is destined, and his own folly. Like his Homeric predecessor, he draws close to the gates of death and is over-whelmed by the malevolent revenge-taking of his enemies.

Leaving the Pisan Cantos, one finds, in the last lines of Section: Rock-Drill, the virtual end of the trials of Odysseus, as the final shipwreck brings him to the Phaeacian shore:

"That the wave crashed, whirling the raft, then  
Tearing the oar from his hand,  
broke mast and yard-arm  
And he was drawn down under wave,  
The wind tossing,  
Notus, Boreas,  
as it were thistle-down."  
- XCV : 680.

The safe arrival at Phaeacia, placed at the end of a Section of the Cantos suggests that here the Poundian Odyssey ends. Setting his house in order may follow, however, and in this the emphasis given to the aid of Leucothea is significant. Twice subject to a change of state, from Ino, daughter of Cadmus into a goddess,

"mortal once  
Who now is a sea god"

and from the form of a woman to that of a sea-gull in her dealings with Odysseus, she embodies the theme of metamorphosis, but more importantly, she acts to bring order from chaos and to preserve the hero. The attention given to her parentage as "Ino Kadmeia" is highly relevant: her father, Cadmus, is the symbol of the constructive, god-fearing man whose virtues enabled him to found a great city. She is an ideal assistant for Pound in his efforts to put the world to rights, and

"To build the city of Diocce whose terraces are the  
colour of stars."

- LXXIV : 451.

The "Ulysses theme" in Pound's poetry is a strong and appropriate one. From the time of an early letter in which he listed as a major topic, "which I and 9,000,000 other poets have spieled endlessly", that of "men go on voyages",<sup>26</sup> the concept of a voyage of discovery was natural to him. His own life encouraged the parallel, although fate seems

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26 Letters, p.38.

to have made the identification even closer than any self-directed career could have done. Like Odysseus, Pound has explored uncharted regions concerned with all aspects of life, and embarked on his periplum without the second-hand assistance of a map.

Homer's appeal was that he provided Pound with the model of an adventurous man and offered a complementary examination of a beautiful woman and the consequences of succumbing to her charms. These archetypal figures were presented to Pound through the medium of unexcelled poetry from the master poet who stands at the head of Western literature. To emulate him was to strive to be great. Michael Reck<sup>27</sup> passes on an episode from Pound's days in St. Elizabeth's, told him by Frank L. Moore:

"We heard a shout and saw Pound, up in his window, leaning out and singing Greek verse to us at the top of his lungs. Happy, full of happiness, and playing the part of Homer."

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27 Reck, op. cit., p.108.



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